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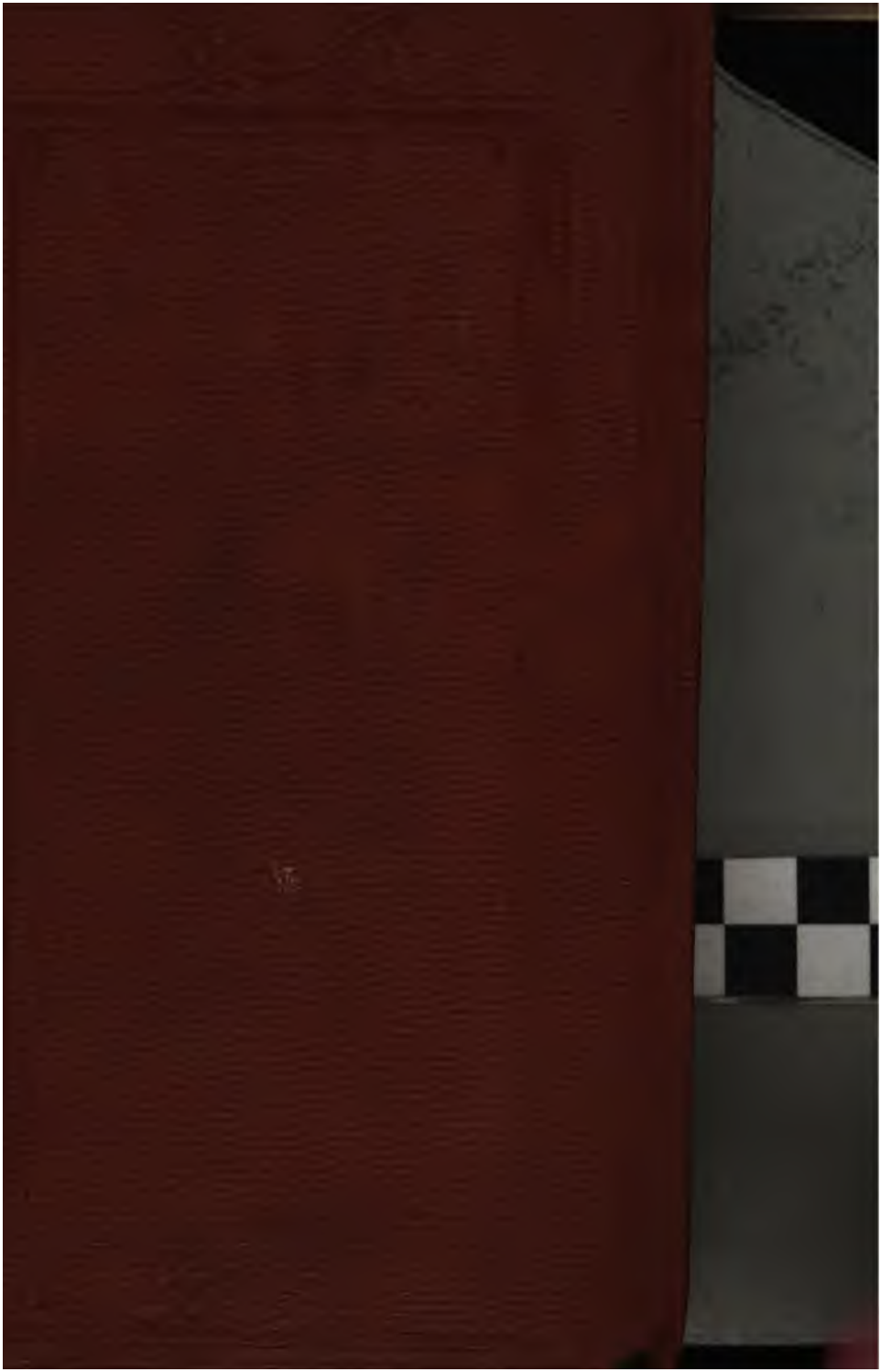

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MEG OF ELIBANK

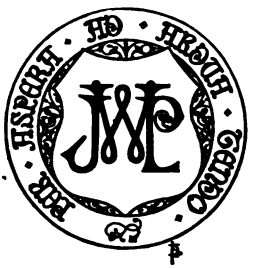
AND OTHER TALES.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'THE NUT-BROWN MAIDS.'

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 'FRASER'S MAGAZINE.'

'Do noble things, not dream them, all day long.'
C. KINGSLEY.



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MEG OF ELIBANK.

RECOVERED FROM A PIGEON-HOLE IN AN ANCIENT ESCRITOIR. THE MSS. MODERNIZED IN LANGUAGE, AND WITH OCCASIONAL INTERPOLATIONS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOWER—SIR GIDEON'S HOUSEHOLD.

'MANY changes have taken place since I was a maiden, hard bound in Elibank Tower; many more may be to the fore; but I tell you, peace, right, wisdom, and slackened reins, are settling fast on every grey hill-side and in every hollen glen, when matched with the riding and running, heading and hanging, that my auld een have seen.'

We wot this is the truth. Kings may yet battle with their lords, one clan tussle with another, red blood be spilt on hill, dale, and causeway, but the gay moss-troopers—the rough riders of Tweedside and Teviotdale—are sore broken since Gibbie with

the Gowden Garters paid his bride's keep with the spuilie of one harvest moon. A poor man dare not now harry a flock of sheep across the marches, or fancy a mare and her foal, but he must face warrants and king's officers, the Tolbooth and the Grass-market. Less ceremony, we wot, when King James betrayed the Cock of the Border. The change is not to be mourned, though doubtless they were our gayest and gallantest hearts, those wild followers of Buccleugh, and Ferniehurst, and Maxwell; it was an uneasy pillow and an ill awakening when a lunt from barn and biggin, with pistol shots and steel flashes, might daunton you any night from Beltane to Yule; and stark want succeed rowth and plenty in the whisk of a single foray.*

'You may have seen many a lordly castle and bonny hidden shaw, but if you have not beheld Elibank, with the grey hills rising round and round, and the siller Tweed rowing by, you know not the lonesomest, lovesomest spot on earth.

'You may sit a whole day in your chamber, and see nought but a corbie on the craig, or a cony clappit among the bracken, or a moorcock crowing above the heather. The hills are grey there with every cloud, and rise on both sides high in the lift, with here and there a thornbush or a rowan, until they meet the fringe of the forest, stretching away, with its tawny oaks, and glossy beeches, and its antlered stags, to Newark and Bowhill. The water below is clear as glass or else a reaming flood, and at each end the glen's shut in and the world's shut

* Interpolation.

out. In winter when the scaurs are white, the smoke from the tower rises cheerily in the frosty air. In summer there is the scent of the wild thyme and the heather, and the drone of the humble bee, so still is the glen; and the twitter of the water-wagtails, skimming across the river, eluding the hawks.

'Lady Elibank would sit on the battlements, with her women at her back; and Sir Gideon would ride in and out, booted and spurred, and whiles glancing in his armour; and scores of retainers would muster in the court; and the innocent bairns would wander over bank and brae and plait rushes and chase waterhens the long, long day.

'The tower was like its neighbours on the water, only notable for strength. It had vaults that might have held an army of prisoners, with slits that let through no blessed sunlight where they lay, the guard giving them bread and water, or offering the ill-omened bloody bull's head. Above, was the great arched kitchen, with black rafters, and a chimney as big as our bower. In the court without, the well sank fathoms beneath the tower foundations—and I trow they were hard, solid rock—shaded by an oak tree that never minded the stour, but filled the entire corner, as if it had been a lone nook in the forest, and hung green and low over the wall. I mind how the grey cats sat in its branches, and howlets and bats flew out of its round top; and once Langshaw climbed it, and spoke with Mary at her window after the doors were locked fast. In the next story was the hall, its single deep window looking down the glen; there hung the highest antlers, and the broadest bucklers, and the weightiest axes in the

country side. There the household met round the long table at meals, as by the hearth at nights, and even when we had no guests we were not few. Sir Gideon in his great chair and Lady Elibank facing him, my sister Mary at my father's right hand, my brothers Rob and Allan and Wat, and me, and Annot, and the younger bairns, Lady Elibank's Jean, Grace, and Madge, and Nurse Ailie, Black Quentin, and Malice, and Sandy, and Daddy Michael, besides the warden, and maybe a round dozen of men-at-arms. The hall was fitted with oak settles and stools, and great chairs for Sir Gideon and Lady Elibank, likewise silk cushions for the Lady. There was a big open buffet, with shelves cut in queer scallops and pleasant devices, and laid out with a sight of Venetian glass, of as deep and delicate a purple as the lining of sea-shells that I've seen brought all the way from the coast; and silver plate dishes, and sconces, and cups, for we were not small gentry—the Murrays of Elibank, and Outlaw Murray, his deeds and his compact, have been sung over land and sea. Lady Elibank's chamber had an oval mirror that gave back her whole person, and sundry chased caskets, and the bed was hung with wrought satin, and a coverlet of piled velvet, a thought faded in its ruby. I remember no other luxuries nor rarities that the tower contained; for our border knights set not store on stately decorations, seeing that they often quitted their four walls, stripping them bare, or, on an extremity, kindling the brand beneath their roof trees with their own hands, preferring to meet the enemy among their hills and glens, to being beleaguered behind

moat, palisade, or turrets, as the royal Bruce counselled, and the doughty Douglas lent them byword, "Better to hear the lark sing," quoth stout Angus, "than the mouse cheep." So, though the tower could be pranked fine enough on an occasion, our riches were mostly such as we could carry off on our backs, beneath our mail-harness, or which we counted by scores and hundreds of heads of cattle and sheep on the knowes.

'The young folk were reared with a plain and frugal hand, lying down on hard beds, and supping thin but wholesome broo, and good, stiff oatmeal parridge, in which the spurtle stood erect without a stay—as was right and fitting.

'My mother's chamber and the arras-room and the bed-closets opened upon the roof; and there too, beneath a hinged plank, was the secret chamber, or rather a steep ladder that led down a black gulf to the same, from which was another more regular staircase, and a damp, winding, grave-like way—for it was far below the ground, with few openings for air, let alone light—of a quarter of a mile or more, that ended in a boat-house on the water, where a boat was ever chained ready for urgent use; and so the hunted man could ply his oars red-handed, and win the day, escaping the foes whom one short half-hour since were only parted from him by an oaken door, against which they rattled and raged like thunder. The hole was never used in my day, but the dourest of the race owed it life and liberty.

'Mary's room and mine was but a closet beneath the leads, where the cold was so intense in winter, that but for our young blood and a down cod that

Nurse Ailie made and smuggled into us, we would have frozen outright; and in summer so steaming hot as necessitated early rising, and left no temptation to sloth and sluggishness. Our bed was but a straw mattress, well spread with lily sheets; and our keeking-glass so small that when we were nice—when Mary was, I mean—she tripped down to a jouk in the water, and busked her hair to her bonny shadow there. But the bravest summer parlour that man could devise was the battlements: the free air around and about you—nought to disturb your meditations save the tramp, tramp of the sentry. From the highest pinnacle of the tower, out of the stone and lime, grew a long spray of briony, that waved in the lightest breath of air, and a posy of wallflower, that on a June night shed as welcome a fragrance as the hay-ricks on the haugh where the adders nestled.

'The orchard and the garden were on separate terraces, each terrace commanding the river, with a fine row of yew trees, like great heads of dark verdure, the like of which was not to be seen nigher than Nidpath.

'I was born in the arras chamber in the year of grace ——, of gentle forbears on both sides; for if my father was Murray of Elibank, my mother was a Riddel. I was not the first-born, and farther from the dawtet youngest. My sister Mary was a year and a-half older, and Rob and Allan and Wat, and Annot and Janet and Jean, were the younger band. As our family held mostly by maidens, I was of less account; and when I grew up hard-favoured and blate and glum—unless it were my bonnie sister

Mary, and maybe one or other of the lads when they were in danger or disgrace, and wanted a hearer and helper—I would not have been greatly missed though the Tweed had borne me out to the broad sea; or burial-bread and wine had been spread in the hall, and a maiden's burial train had wound up the glen, and across the heather to lone St. Mary's.

'But think not that I was misused among my own kin, or that my father and mother had an unnatural spite against one of their children. They were in a sense oppressed with bairns, congregated and crowded among the ploughs and wheels and spurs and spears of Elibank; and they might have spared one without loud lament. At least they had no special love to spare, save for express gifts,—the sunny locks of Mary, or Rob and Allan's gallant youthied, when they beat the English at the ford, and carried home golden chains and rings, and silver-girded quaighs, beneath their plaids, forbye the heads of cattle and webs of cloth at their backs; or when they challenged Yair and Fernilee to sword-play, and came off victorious without a single scar or rent on their side, and blood filling the hose of the one billie, and dropping down the chin of the other.

'It's a dull blast on a young opening heart, this same lightlying regard.

'My father was a busy, imperious man, much in the saddle; when out of it, on the moor or in the forest, save when he presided at a baron's court, or filled his great chair at meals, or dozed over his ale or his wine in the warmth of his own hearth. Scanty notice to spare had stout Sir Gideon for wenches,

yet he showed me more grace than Lady Elibank. I can call him up right before me at this moment, the buirdly knight, with his red cloak and his cap and feather, except when he mounted his steel morion; his sapphire eye and his grizzled beard; his great fist, which shook the oak-table as he would strike it in his angry moods, for he had hot blood when his locks were grey; his laugh when he was pleased; his mocking, pitying clap on the shoulder: "Poor Meg! no knight will ever wear your colours; but let them go, and content you with the ingle neuk at Elibank."

'My mother was a high-spirited woman, that gave herself and others little rest. Fain would she be lady paramount on Tweedside and the waters, in spite of Newark and Bowhill; bitterly she strove with Lady Douglas; ill she liked that daughter of hers should be scorned. She was a grand-like woman herself to see, with a neck like a swan's, and a carriage like a stag; and no doubt it was hard to thole that all her daughters should not bear marks of their descent. She took pride in Mary's lily skin and brent brow; the lave were young things, berry brown, and with tangled pows; but, God forgive me for the thought! I misdoubt me it was a fight to hinder a scunner at her Muckle-mou'd Meg; but she was a wise woman as well as wilful; and for credit and honour, and our Lady and sweet St John, she hasted and strangled that serpent, and only passed me by.

'We had in general, us women-folk, quiet days in the tower: we spun and bleached, and brewed and baked, day after day. Lady Elibank permitted no

idle set. At fit seasons there was feasting at Traquhair or Nidpath, and wrestling or shooting among the men of Selkirk and the men of Peebles or Teviotdale; and Sir Gideon and Lady Elibank, and my brothers and Mary, would ride out in beavers and gold tassels, and French silk and Flanders lace, and what not, all waving and shining as they vanished down the way; but I abode at home, for I was second daughter, and did not set ploys, and could rule the tower and guide the bairns in my mother's absence; and, save to the abbey, to confess to Father Anthony, or to high mass, I did not leave the glen—did not care to do so. My sister was the bonnie May of Elibank, round whom wooers thronged — Langshaw, and Wedderburn, and Corehead, and many more; and I was "Muckle-mou'd Meg," whom they forgot or jeered at.

'I did not envy my blythe, sweet sister; but I was a young fool, and I would flee from the sound of their rejoicings—the ladies' lutes and the minstrels' harps, and the measure meted by twinkling feet, and the healths and huzzas of roaring, roystering vassals; and lie and greet among the heather, or creep down and keek sadly into the water to see if there were no remede. No, no; Nurse Ailie thought that I had the soft een and round throat of the cushat dove, but my cheeks were brown, and my "muckle mou'," wide and broad, scared all wooers. I was made for a house drudge, to be no singer's song, no house's gudewife, no man's choice, no bairnie's mother. I might have known that the Lord, who knows and appoints our lot, is a just Judge, and can be more to a plain and forlorn

woman than "ten sons"—ay, or than ten bold gudemen; but I was sour and sad at this chap of the knock that was winding up my destiny, and I have wished to die in my youth, and I have thought to speak to Father Anthony, and seek the gloaming of the cloister; but my wit told me that I would mock Heaven with a blemished offering which the world rejected; and that, whate'er betide, I would fain breathe the caller mountain air, and wander at will on the clear braes, or hide me in the misty corries. What better would my sick heart be if my body were locked into a narrow cell, and me, graceless wretch, with no vocation for beads and bells, streaming tapers and the smoke of incense? So through His mercy who orders all things well, I was saved from that living death to them who are but the cast-out weeds of the world's great garden, and not the sainted lilies of Paradise. I was kept for earthly weal and woe, joy and sorrow, and hallowed household love, that sweetened and softened, and strengthened and sanctified each mortal care or bliss, though I knew it not for many a weary day.

'But one summer morning, as I walked out on the fell, with the fleecy clouds floating high in the pure air, and the blue-bells blossoming at my feet, and the trout leaping in the water, the throstle singing, the flocks bleating, the laughing and daffing of the lads and lasses about the tower wafted on the wind, I took heart, and said to myself, What for should I be dowie when all else was gay? or handless and heartless, when all else was busy in the sunshine—the birds building their nests, the cattle cropping the sward? Because I was not fair, so should I be

the more good and eydent, till every one should wish me well and do me honour, and the blessed Mother and Son niffer my cross for a crown; and though a lass be bright as the new-born day, and peerless as the bride of King Solomon, I doubt that her winning favour, and the soft words and sighs and sobs of her true lovers, will prove but vanity, or her cheek grow thin and her ee dim to mortal sight, if she come not to make the same resolve.

'We had our share of yearly diversions at Elibank: I mean the merrymakings, where Jean and Madge and Grace were in the thick of the ploy, and which Lady Elibank and her daughters graced with their presence; while Sir Gideon and his sons bore them company, and tested their strength and suppleness with the best of the shepherds and hinds. We had waukins of the fauld, and sheep-shearings, and kirns; and Mary and I went three times a-day in June and July to the upland, where the kye had their summer pasture, to see them milked, or to lend a hand ourselves.

'We had few chance visitors, forby a monk from Melrose, a palmer from beyond the seas, a harper singing as he walked, or a neighbouring knight or lady, craving lodgings as they rode up Tweedside, on their way to the Court at Holyrood or Stirling, or in Fife when the King was hunting at Falkland, or come but to pree our cake and pudding and spiced wine. My father lent himself courteously and hospitably to entertain the gentry, but the priest or singer was our charge. He sat in our corner of the hall; sang or read for our benefit legends of St. Christopher, with the world's sin and the world's Saviour on his

brave back; of tortured St. Bartholomew and St. Genevieve; and our own St. Margaret, that tended the miserable lepers with her gentle queen's hands; or romaunts of Roland or William Wallace, or bauld verses of wild Katherine Janferie in the glen, or the pulling of the heather-green in "the dowie dens of Yarrow." They were not all so touching and tender; they were spun out to serve a sitting, or doled fast by weary lips to dull and heedless ears; but in the long winter nights they beguiled our threads of flax, or the silken twine of our embroidery; for we were taught what became our sex and station by Lady Elibank's Jean, that was trained to the sound of the waves by the sisters of Dundrennan. Wat and Rob and Allan sat with the men, sharpening axes or stringing bows, or whittling bolts and polishing bridles; and Annot and the young pack ran and danced here and there till bedtime. If there was like to be silence, Mary would sing like a lintie, when my mother would suffer the clear piping notes that Elibank liked well; and I grew to carry the keys at my girdle, and to plait all the pinners worn in the tower.'

CHAPTER II.

THE FORAY.

'IN September or in October, when the bear was cut, and the round Michaelmas moon sailing over fords and by-paths, there was work of another description. Messengers rode to and fro for a day or two; meetings of the clan by twos and threes spread few rumours then. Sir Gideon donned his morion and buckled on his broadsword, and looked work-like, as he hounded back his dogs, and cast off his falcon; and man after man came riding into the court in the snell cloudy sunset, or waited on the lea without, and had their Jeddart axes and their long spears reflected in broken shadows in the foaming water. Lights flickered as the day darkened, and the lasses jinked in and out to get a parting word or a jeer from the gay moss-troopers.

'It was a grand moment when Sir Gideon, with a long stride and a cheery "gude e'en," out and mounted his mettle steed, and spurs pricking, and bridles clinking, and shouts dying away in the distance of "Good luck, Habbie;" and "Our Lady guard you;" and "Mind a pacing horse;" or "The aumrie stoup and roup;" or "A pair of English blankets, ye loon;" and the whole cavalcade, vanishing down the narrow pathway, lit up with the faint moonbeams, like the fairy train on Carterhaugh seen in feverish dreams.

'I know not that my mother ever caused fill a dish with the significant long spurs, but I mind she

laughed when Elibank rode out, and ever refused to keep watch and ward or his return, but retired to rest as readily as if she slept still as a rock. There might be sleepless een in Elibank, but it was in secret, for every matron and maid but to lie down, as was their wont, and pine or pray for the day. Sir Gideon and his men, in their greatest success, would not hie home till the chill dawn was struggling with the pit mirk that succeeded the early moon. We heard their approach before we saw them, the clatter of their hoofs—and sound of triumph!—the frightened bleat of sheep hurried on by lances, and the low of cattle, houghed if they threatened to stray.

'At the first alarm we rushed to wicket and loop-hole, and those who were ready dressed to the battlements, and a proud woman was she that soonest spied the band. Sore draggled were they as men that had ridden many a mile through mire and bog to lift a cloot from a rival laird, or as far as the Lothians; their horses pressed and blown, the men themselves sometimes white and haggard with weariness, if they were not scorched or wounded; but if they had made a great haul, such bragging and fleeching and casting of bonnets into the misty air. We ran down to the court to meet them. My father cried for a horn of wine before he alighted, and Mary, who was privileged, put her foot upon his boot and riped his deep pockets; he shouting "Hooly," and snatching kisses for payment, and she drawing out a string of fair pearls, or a cross of ruddy gold, or a tall drinking glass, shattered on the road, or even a dame's laced hood for the Lady. When the pouches were toom, Mary threaded the

raised riders, and ran to wale the bales already binged in a corner, or to the forfoughten herd to chap her quey or her pet lamb, and troopers lifted their caps and cried, the most spent of the group, "A benison on the bonnie, blythe May of Elibank!" and a grey-headed henchman would hastily and heartily subjoin, "And gude go with Muckle-mou'd Meg." Yes, Mary always threepit that Meg should share alike with herself, alike with quey and lamb, in sacque and mantle, a great odds in man's praise and devotion.

'The fattest of the beeves was killed on the spot, and steaks roasted, and ale and usquebaugh flowed, for the night at least, in Elibank, like hill-side rills at Lammas.

'Once Elibank and his men were hard followed, and traced to the tower, and a raging host of Swintons came up and surrounded our hold; and the hinds with their families were called in, and the great gate steekit, and the brig drawn up, and blunderbusses pointed, and us women, save Lady Elibank, sent to dark closets to cover our ears, and keep out the roar of the hill echoes answering to the rattle of the fight; until a party of Cars passing westward, heard tidings of our strait, and came to our aid; and the Swintons, not daring to wait till we should issue and join our allies, marched off as they came, and there was but a few slain or wounded; the last to be looked to and leeched by our hands; and though Mary surpassed me at kneading a dough cake, I was allowed to bind the firmer bandage, and to brew the more soothing sleeping draught.

'More by token, the English twice besieged us in

my day, when there was war declared between the kingdoms; and the first siege lasted so long that we were skin and bone, and fit to eat the staves of our beef barrels before they gave in and left us.

'Oh, it was sweet to wander once more down by the clear, bickering water, or up among the thorns and rowans and heather, with none to make us afraid. I know not how we could have borne our captivity and danger, if tending the sick had not filled our hands and diverted our thoughts, taking the place of our ordinary spinning and stitching, all broken in upon and relinquished in these anxious weeks.

'But there was one foray long minded at Elibank, and that left a token branded on the hearts there. Sir Gideon and his men had departed at nightfall ere the Michaelmas harvest was clean gathered, and we were counting the gear and boasting over the easy prey, even as Sisera's mother when to every man was to be "a damsel or two," and "to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework," when, through the thick drizzle of a dark rainy morning, we descried our clan's return, each rider as silent as the grave. That was an evil omen, and our hearts grew heavy as lead; then they drew nearer, and, alack, there was a doleful burden across a horse's neck, my young brother Allan, a gallant hafflin youth of sixteen, no more, groaning under his death wound, with his shirt and doublet dripping with blood, and his roving ee fast settling in death. They carried him into the hall, and my mother took his head in her lap, but she neither screeched nor moaned nor shed a tear. I saw my father come forward with a brow as black as

Bourhope when it is crushed under the thunder cloud; he shook his fist above the stiffening body, and swore a curse that rung in a wail and cry through the bounds of Applegarth; but my mother spoke soft and still in answer to the death-rattle. "You're in anguish, my boy, but the pang's swift; you've been a credit to your house, Allan, my son, let that lend your soul an easy passage."

'Allan was streeket and waked. Mary and I wove willow garlands, watering them with our tears, and laid them upon his cold breast, that looked so broad and manly in its everlasting stillness, and the tower seemed to ring for many a day to the "Christ sall sain his soul" of the chanting priests, long after Allan was beneath the mools among the hills that darkened and moaned for him every night they sank among low banks of clouds, to the chill sad breezes; and when I prayed for Allan's pardon and peace, I was fain to add a word for the husbands and sons as stark as he, whom the Murrays slew that yule in green Applegarth.'

CHAPTER III.

THE LAIRD OF LANGSHAW.

'THE blue-bells and the wild roses were flaunting on the dark scaurs, when the young Laird of Langshaw came up the glen after our Mary. Oh, he was a fair and a pretty man to look upon, black and stalwart, with a flashing hawk's ee, that, even when he played and made merry, pierced one through and through; and a brow, where his helmet shaded it, white as ivory, a thought narrow, but making up in height. He was fierce in battle as Sir Gideon's self, and in the hall a grand stately gallant. Sir Gideon and Lady Elibank did not say him nay, for Langshaw was good land and wide, and a bien stance among its oaks and hazels for a lady's bower; and the Cars pulled caps with the Murrays in friendly guise, both casting their steel glaives at the Scots.

'It could not be that Mary would scout at Langshaw, save that a maiden's mind is ill to read, and Mary was petted and had suitors far and near; and though she set store on Langshaw and his dignity and devoirs, she looked and spoke as if she cared little for either, and like many a saucy beauty, carried the jest too far: not that Langshaw showed pique; he bowed to her maggots; he that stooped to no other, yielded entirely to her. Her flouts and perverseness appeared to make him keener in his courtship. He rode week after week to Elibank; he walked with Mary and me by burn and brae, casting

me, the plain younger sister, but an idle word or a passing service; he managed her palfrey when Sir Gideon started a heron or entered the forest and followed the deer; he attended her to the abbey, and knelt by her side on the stone pavement, under the grand groined roof; and whatever she prayed for, I trow he supplicated his saint to deny him aught else, but to grant him the sweet May of Elibank to sit at his board and sleep in his bosom.

'What opened my eyes to trow there was other than true love in his devotion—I that was but a simple maiden, unsought myself? I struggled against the thought, I denied the secret charge, but ever it returned, and smote me with a pang of doubt and dread. When he whispered in her ear, and Mary turned her shoulder, his dark eye never fell, but shot as it were a spark of fire on her petulance; when she danced a measure with Corehead, and Langshaw looked on, he smiled to himself as he pulled at his frills.

'There was a football match on Hartley Fell, and more than one signal chance befell on the green. Mark Car of Hartley had covenanted with my father that they should have a great match on the fell, and score upon score gathered to the contest—so many Murrays, and Cars, and Homes, and Hepburns, Brydens, Jardines, Elliots, and Pringles, that names and men were there in the crowd scarce entitled to the summons, between whom and their neighbours were long grim grudges easily stirred, and apt to be quelled by staves or daggers; however, there was no skirmish that day. Knight and vassal, laird and yeoman, strove equally in the game; and a pleasant

sight it was, the whole quiet flat alive with runners and judges and lookers-on and led horses. The hinds in their hodden grey, the shepherds in their plaids, the men-at-arms wearing their various badges, and some bearing banners and pennons, the knights and barons with their glancing swords and high beavers and waving plumes. The fair ladies of Bowhill, and Yair, and the May of Elibank on their palfreys, gracing the concourse of sun-burnt country lasses, trigly snooded and screened, that had trudged over many a mile of heather and bracken to be present at the spectacle; and dogs of every degree, staghounds and greyhounds in leashes, led by grooms under pretence of giving them an airing, hairy barking terriers, wise composed colleys.'

In the multitude at such trysts there were wont to be men and women that, had folk been gifted with the second sight, would have stood out from all others, girded with a ring of wan light. Yon tall young man with bushy beard and the hand in his breast, would appear, not as now, eagerly watching the players and biding his turn, but galloping here and there on the bloody battle-field of Newliston, stabbing the wounded, slashing the faces of the prisoners, and piercing the broken heart of the 'hardiest, stoutest, wisest man that Scotland bore,' as lamented Sir James' own father and Lennox's uncle, the gude Earl of Arran—he that covered Lennox decently with his scarlet cloak. Yon Lady Marjory, that fondles the worthless jay, think you how she looked when, as wife and mother, she ran demented up the Megget water to drown in the roar of the Linn the strokes

and shouts that announced the hanging of her chosen gudeman, Piers Cockburn of Henderland !*

'I was there myself, for my father appeared with a large retinue. We started from Elibank in the sweet June morning, when the dew was glistening like diamonds on the broom, and the throstle singing in the copse. Elibank's mantle was laid over with rich fur, and his cap looped up with a diamond rose; and Lady Elibank's kirtle was bound with gold lace and her coif with Valenciennes; and Mary wore her blue hood, the colour of her own dear een. For me, I could grace no bravery; but I was neighbour-like, only as douce in colour as might be—purple gear, the sober hue of the distant hills, and yet a kingly dye, my wimple drawn, not thrown freely back. Though with slight conceit of shows, I could not ride out under the dancing leaves and summer sun, and make one in the holiday procession, without my twenty-year old heart beating in concert. I could have joined in Sir Gideon's whistle, and when we reached the fell, I believed I had never seen so grand a sight.

'When Langshaw and Hartley gripped Mary's bridle together, and my pony left to bogle at the din, a grudge did stound through my heart; but I said an *Ave* below my breath, and looked up into the blue sky, and whipped on as merrily as before.

'How the lusty Tweedside lads span up the ball—how high and low shouted at a good hit! All looked to Langshaw when it neared him; he was so

* Interpolation.

proper a man, so famed for strength and swiftness; but his foot slipped on the short turf, and he got a fall instead of a triumph. He rose lightly enough, and joined like a wise man in the jeers he had provoked; but when Mary's laugh rang loudest—a clear lilting gramercy, I watched him. He smiled again, but the curl of the bearded lip was no honest, generous benison on the May of Elibank and all that she did, whether she laughed or sighed at his cost or at his beck. It was a scoff and a taunt; "Gay lady, ye'll live to rue your mirth."

'That day I could not shut out the perception of the false, shifting, fathomless quicksands beneath the smooth surface. I pressed close to Mary, and tried to caution her, as she was catching the fern-seed that young Corehead stripped off, an ill-done daring. Alake! why should she heed me—she was so secure in her beauty, and favour, and innocence; and she was doomed, our sweet Mary,—the fair, fresh flower of the Murrays. Of what avail name and station, stout friends and stern avengers.

'Since Mary did not want me, and Langshaw scared me, and I was parted from Lady Elibank, and sitting beside Lady Janet of Fowlshiels, I tried to give myself up to the game, and to guess who would be the victor. The player then was a tall, slim lad, with a cheek that, but for the tan, would have been lily fair like a woman's, and een sky-blue like Mary's, and brown hair clustering in thick curls beneath his bonnet. I marked him because he wore the best fancied doublet, the biggest roses in his shoon, the broadest ruff about his neck; and because I saw my father flush and frown when he met his eye, and

Mark Car, who was wily and courtly, take Sir Gideon aside and prate him into sullen acquiescence.

'I speered at Lady Janet "Who was yon braw gallant?" Lady Janet laughed, and bade me not lose my heart, for yon was the brag of the Forest, the bonniest and the haughtiest lad on all the waters, my father's sworn foe, the Knight of Harden. I wot I had heard enough of Harden, and yon was he! Well-a-day, Elibank might bend his brows, for his father's father had fallen by Buccleugh's own hand; and many a Scott and many a Murray had swelled the feud sin-syne.

'So slight a loon could never do credit to the sport, nor shame us Murrays; but just as gentle Lord James beat his rough peers, so Harden spurned the ball, and rode the ring, and threw his man; and none beshrewed his fate to be worsted by such a rival.

'"A Harden! a Harden!" cheered the clans; and well they might, for Sir William's stroke decided the day, while Sir William's self drew back, stroking his silken beard, and staring at the ladies, as if he cared not for his renown.

'"A silver penny if that glowerer be not Elibank's Muckle-mou'd Meg; an ill wind has blown us her face; but, man, I would fain spy his May." The light words reached me as he passed with a comrade. I could stand the jeer, aye, when Harden lived to face me in a different fashion: and I said to myself, "Wow, wow, but there's no joe like you, Sir William; and though your words vouchsafe her little grace, Muckle-mou'd Meg prays that your comely head may not lie in its bloom low and cauld like the clay that bears it, as mony winsome and crouse crowns have done ere now."'

CHAPTER IV.

THE KELPIE'S POOL.

'THE foot-ball match fell in June; and on Midsummer eve Mary and I stole out, under our screens, to learn our fortunes at the Kelpie's Pool.

'The Kelpie's Pool was a shaded stretch of the Tweed, hard by a birkwood, half a mile from the tower. There was a lock in the dark water, where a kelpie had been seen signing on man and beast to cross; and the place was unchancy to ford, and unsafe maybe for mortal at any season; but if young maidens would sit there by turns on Midsummer's eve, and gaze on the shifting current, they would come to trace through its broken lines of foam the faces of their future marrows.

'Mary would test the freit; and though I held it vain, and perchance sinful, I could not deny her, for, mind you, my sister Mary was the dearest object on earth to me.

'The night was warm and still, with that sultry, yellow haze that sometimes ends a summer's day. It veiled the opposite line of hills, but you could clearly distinguish the huge fires on their summits, and you could hear faintly the hum of the voices of those that binged them, and watched their blaze; and black figures, as if moving, demon-like, through and through the red glow and the long white lows, crossed your startled vision; — a distant, strange show, increasing instead of abating our loneliness.

'Mary would have me try the spell first, for I had banned it, and she was fain to credit its power, and her nerves were failing her; also, the latest watcher was the most certain of a glimpse of destiny. So Mary sat down on this side of the birkwood, and I went in and forced my way to the spot, dark and damp with the dews. I knelt down and thought of other things. I did not look beyond the alder-bush into the troubled water. It would row loug before it formed itself into the reflection of a face for me. "What for should I goup at a blank?" I asked myself. No, I leant against a tree and laughed; for when I was not cowed, or blate, I had a proneness to laughter, as overcoming and as gleeful as my tears now and then were salt and sad. As soon as I forgot my errand, I grew grave, in keeping with the shady neuk and the gloaming hour. Then I thought of St. John, to whom this night was given, and wondered if he saw me there and was displeased with my weakness and folly; and yet I believed, if his Lord was still in the body, gladly would I have sat at his feet, like the blessed Mary of Bethany.

'I was to watch an hour, and the night air was close and heavy, with bats whirring, and an owl hooting from its post in the cleft oak.

'Elibank Tower had been thrang that day, and I had made two cream cheeses, and reeled the hasps I spun the day before; so nothing hindered me from being weary, and I leant farther and farther back against the slip of a tree, and clasped my hands, and fell into a dover or dwam; unless, indeed, ill was permitted to approach me, which might be, seeing my rashness and the end, and considering that it

came in a far worse shape to my guileless sister Mary.

'My sleep took the form of a dream or a train of dreams, vivid and abrupt, not perplexing me at the time, but, I confess, haunting me afterwards.

'I thought I stood in Elibank Chapel, where banners were waving, and the floor was fresh strewn with green rushes. Sir Gideon confronted me, with a laugh on his bluff face, melting away into dour resolve, that again became dark doubt and discomfiture, and passionate, fierce threat; and Lady Elibank, with a cast of her long neck, and a smile that played like lightning rather than sunshine over her high features; and Rob and Wat, with a wavering expression, that was sometimes mirth, sometimes quick discontent and rising resentment, clearing or clouding their smooth faces; and beyond them, Nurse Ailie and Jean, and the other lasses and the serving-men, all with the same gladness, that was so mocking it was not gladness, and wrath that was so curbed it was true wrath no longer, contending in their varying een, as if some redoubtable deed were working that should descend to posterity with the mingled characters of sport and misery inscribed on its back. In the centre of the perturbed festival, and right in front of me, stood a Mass John, Father Anthony himself, with gown and book; and by my side, ye maidens! the brawest gallant on the waters, let his duds be ever so soiled, and his bright breastplate cloured and dunted — Sir William Scott of Harden. But his head was turned another gate, lasses, and the hand that held mine, cold as death, gripped like a vice, wringing my flesh; and wist you

I was proud of my bonny bridegroom? Oh no, I hung my head, and the pangs of death were sickening my heart: when the scene dissolved like a cloud castle, and in its room rose another pageant.

'I saw another tower than Elibank, not crowning the free braes, but hanging half buried in its woods, like a nest of the fowls of the air, clean ower a dark dell. I sat in the body at a loophole in the thick wall, and watched unseen, as if my heart were in my een, the pit-like road; and by and by there appeared in the hollow, toiling up the ascent, a clump of spears, not riding here and there like our border riders, but in battle array, and a man at their head with a royal standard, and a lion wrought on his sleeve. They halted at the gate and the leader read a paper, demanding the body of a traitor; and I ran down, and with authority—for I was not as at Elibank, but mistress and more—bade draw up the portcullis and admit the horsemen. I spoke them fair, I led them up-stairs and down, and spread bread and wine for their refreshment; and when they turned their backs and rode away I flung myself down before our Lady's shrine, and vowed tapers and an altar-cloth seeded with pearls, for the grace that had saved me and mine in our extremity. I clamb to the battlements, where my lint lay spread to dry, and I lifted up coil after coil, and there shone a knight's spurs and the jewel of his signet ring, and the blue blade he was fain to grasp, though a leap from the turret was his last refuge; and that knight kissed not his lady's hand alone, but he pressed again and again—oh, so kindly!—the white cheek of his faithful dame.

'In a long sigh of rapture that Paradise faded. I seemed to look on other hills and another Tweed, familiar as the first in their lonesome beauty, but yet with an odds, for here were only timid sheep and horned cattle where trumpet sounded and clansmen gathered. The bonnet and the maud were worn but by simple herds of low degree; and for the prancing war-horse were nought but Clydesdale mares and Galloway nags capering at grass; and in a sandy hollow, up among the *hopes*, far from man's habitation, lay a pawky lad bairn, with a crutch in his wee hand, but with grey een glowering fearlessly into the lift black with the wrath of Heaven—the thunderbolt blazing and bursting with a boom that shook the very everlasting hills; and the wise, high-hearted wean only clapped its bit hands at the jagged, blue fire, and skirled "Bonnie! bonnie!" And a voice within me said, "Let knight and soldier, priest and statesman, stand aloof: yonder sits Harden's most renowned son. He will learn the name of 'Muckle-mou'd Meg' stranded in the distant past; and passing by the 'Flower of Yarrow,' he will fling back a kindly recognition to his homely, hard-tried ancestress, he who bore in his world-known face the lingering trace of the 'muckle-mou;'" but so trembling with strong feeling and exquisite humour, so manly and so kind, that men loved that sagacious tender lip far before any delicate feature that John Murdo his chisel could have carved on the scores of faces that crown the fretwork which the monks of Melrose reared. I fancied I had a last view of him, the bones of a strong man, but broken before his time, though he sat and faced

misfortune in a fairy palace, with pope's and princes' gifts at his right hand and his left, still bearing the steadfast will, and the warm heart, and the child's love to the siller Tweed, when all else was slipping from beneath his feet.

'I started up, with my ears ringing, and my heart beating like a sledge-hammer, in a clean amaze; then I saw the Kelpie's Pool and the midges hovering o'er the water, and minded who and where I was, and what I had come for, and kenned I had been dreaming; and ran to Mary, and made her screw her mouth by averring that I had set een on the ghaist of the Pride of Tweedside. Mary was not wont to be captious, save to her lovers, least of all to me, her Meg; but now she pouted and protested, for Mary was used to be first, and doubtless she held dark Langshaw the pick and flower of border knighthood. Waly, that he was to be her fate! She left me proud and petted, and vowing that I should not hear her luck; and that if I spied a knight's spurs, a belted earl, or a prince himself, was the least that could be bestowed on the May of Elibank. I had but space to take her stance on the home-side of the planting, and to mark the yellow moon rising lustrous in the sky, when a sharp, frightened cry rang out of the wood. I started up, and flew back like a deer. I cared not what harm the disturbers of the charm dared, I thought but of Mary, scared or hurt. God and our Lady keep her from terrible knowledge of the green-eyed Kelpie we had so witlessly provoked! I broke through the boughs; there stood Mary, beset by no fiend or evil spirit, but clasped in the mailed arms of Langshaw.

My heart gave one bound of relief, and the next moment fell. Why should Mary lie still on Langshaw's bosom? Why should she not only consent to his convoy to the tower, but cling to him the whole way, and I walking by, seeing that he had stolen deceitfully on her secrecy, and that she had professed to dally with, and lightly his wooing? Ah, this was the weakness of infatuated submission following hard on the weakness of vanity and folly.'

CHAPTER V.

THE PLUCKING OF THE FLOWER OF ELIBANK.

'IT was ill done that forward, fractious skirmishing, exhausting the poor combatant's powers, rendering such a one entirely at the conqueror's mercy, once the tide of battle turned, a certain end when the strong deigned to war with the weak—it was ill thought that giddy pride, anticipating a fall.

'We watched by the Kelpie's Pool at Midsummer, and long ere Michaelmas there were other roses withering than the wallied buds in our garden; and Mary whiles grat when she thought none was by, as she sat on the bink by our chamber window, while our maidens stitched her gay mantles, looking out for one that was now weeks and weeks without putting foot on Elibank Green.

'Oh, this was no blessed young bride's comely gravity, this sinking of the heart, this racking doubt; this was the frail and wayward, but soft and loving

temper's inevitable reaction after its brief licence, its ungenerous, ill-considered tyranny; and once Langshaw attained the hour of reprisal, he crushed it as remorselessly as ever shepherd lad the fresh, speckled egg of the lavrock, or the mealy fluttering wings of a rare butterfly.

'I know not if others read these passages which none could lament like me. I think not; the world was a fighting, working world, and took note of nought but downright, open words and actions; and Langshaw never dreamt of not fulfilling his troth-plight, but tied the inseverable knot in God's house, and before a fair company, and bore off his bride.

'What was there to ferly at, or deplore that our beauty Mary learnt, long before she vowed it at any shrine, to term the wooer she had held at bay, lord and master,—aye, to hang upon his word and tremble at his frown? It was but a vagary of love's working —one of its sweet riddles. It might have been these extremes were not aye disastrous: true hearts have won and worn them with noble, gentle chivalry —but it was not so here.

'We had a gay bridal; trains of Murrays and Cars; feasting, state and holiday. Sir Gideon meting out williewaughts of glee, Lady Murray becking and bowing here and there. We rode in yet braver trim to holy Melrose than to Hartley Fell; but craig and brake were white with the cold hoar frost, like the winding-sheet of the dead.

'I moped, not alone because that day I lost my sister Mary, and because I should never busk me as a bride, whom priest should bless, and lover fondly claim as his life-long treasure; but, while there was

dule for the future, there was no comfort in the present; no glint and glow on the bonny bent face that rode foremost of the throng; no bridegroom's joy in Langshaw's deep tones and stately gait, the central sun of the noisy gladness resounding from tower and lea, the red wine of the feast. Ah, me! there was weary yearning and blank disappointment, well nigh despair, in the poor heart awakened all too late, and fainting under its own luckless tenderness, once freely lavished, scorned and flung back for evermore. There was cruel contempt and blighting indifference on the careless lip and the cold wandering eye that met and mocked at the propine.

'That pageant was a fairy show to me, and more than me, at last; as heartless and hollow—sain us from the good people's anger at the comparison.

'I had a sore second sight that I should never again see my sister Mary, with whom I had played in childhood and covenanted in youth; never again with mortal vision from the hour that her bright golden hair was bound straight, and hidden beneath the heavy curch; and so it befell; Langshaw was not within many miles of Elibank, and ere a short season fled, Langshaw and Sir Gideon differed on some dispute of the times, and would have drawn sword in horrible sacrilegious murder, as did Dryhope and Gilmanscleugh, had they not been promptly and powerfully severed. Sir Gideon was tough as an ashen stave, and Langshaw a very Lucifer, so there was no hope of farther intercourse between the households. Thus Mary came not back to Elibank, and the fragments of tidings that drifted to us anent her doing, made mair hearts than mine grow

grit. Lady Elibank would never credit them, but Sir Gideon stamped and swore, because an angry, bearded man could not sit down and greet, and this was no wrong that his sword or his clan could wash out. We knew of a certainty that Langshaw's arrogant, jealous, uncertain temper worked on him month by month, and year by year, until the brave, haughty gallant grew a moody, hard man; harsh to his vassals; turbulent among his freres; a mover in dark plots and ceaseless raids: and if he paid not the penalty with his head, as most looked for and as others fared, he did it twice over in the ill will and bad blood, the hatred and execration with which he was banned before manhood had declined into middle age. Men lived hard then, harder and faster than now; for few, few of name or note donned the long gown and the cap of peace of threescore; and, if some committed crimes sackless, others dreed their doom aforehand.

'Therefore we for the most part believed what we would have given the world to unbelieve—that the bird which sung so sweetly and crousely in Elibank ingle neuk, ruffled its feathers and cowered mute and drooping on its own high perch. An ailing, spiritless wife, lonely in her bigget wa's, dowie in her childless hame; her lines that had begun so pleasantly, lifted and cast among ceaseless alarms, where there was no peace, no canny craft or mild arts to beguile the weary and worsted; even ghostly counsel and reverend fathers whiles scarce.

'Feeble, friendless, and forsaken, our dawted Mary she reached the very end, the boundary of misery. Her reason reeled; and remorseless rumour recounted

to us how a long, white, demented woman wandered about the rich chambers and the wide woods of Langshaw; dumb for weeks, or else yammering noon and night, "Was not Langshaw come hame?" or, "What, oh, what in the world wide would please him?"

'This was the tragedy of my bonny sister Mary. Heard you ever a ditty more doleful? Oh, pray, pray that the blythe young hearts of your hearths may not live to burst in twain, and you in your turn be condemned to travel on without fail.

'This burden came not upon us suddenly and unexpectedly; but it worked the greater dule that it could not, like Allan's death-wound, be returned stab for stab, without creating still ghastlier wrong.

'In one dunning of the birken tree I sickened and lay down, and was so long silly in my dark chamber, on an uneasy bed, that when I next tottered out the young lambs were cropping the spring gowans, and the light wind waving the yellow broom ayont yon hills on distant Cowdenknowes. Lady Murray—the whole company of saints assoilzie her high heart!—was a stour woman as before; but Sir Gideon, though he hawked and hunted, save always when he mingled in fray as keenly as in his youth, though his laugh still shook the rafters, would sigh as he sat in the ingle neuk, and gaze around as if he missed a once-prized sight, or start with a sudden throb of memory stounding through his father's heart.

'I ever deemed that the sunshine of Elibank departed with Mary, whose fair face I saw in many a moonbeam, and heard her sweet voice in the gushes and echoes of the summer wind, as plainly as ever I

felt her actual presence; nevertheless, the lads and Annot and the lave were growing up as cheery as though no warning had darkened the threshold. And what for no? If the racer stumbled at the first rough stab or frowning bourock, who would run till he won the goal?'

CHAPTER VI.

THE REIVER'S LIFT.

'THE March winds were soughing and swelling, when the turning-day of my destiny rose, not in a mirk October or November dawn, but one March morning, when we feared no danger, the tower was raised with a hue and a cry that the reivers had been in about over-night. Black Quentin and Malice, and Grace and Madge, ran to the out-houses, and soon sounded our loss. Barn and byre stood gaping wide; the infauld was cleared out; not a head of cattle, not a quey, nor ewe lamb, was left at Elibank.

'They had laid brands to the peats and stacks and hay, but the wind blew up the glen, and a shower fell, so the fire had smouldered and sunk in ashes; but we were a harried family, without meat or milk save the lumps in the salting barrels and the cogs that were filled yestreen, till Elibank sent up the water to call in his stots there.

'Elibank was redwud to have his gear stolen beneath his very een, and insult added to injury; for in the centre of the court rested a shield, sky-blue

and gold, with shining crescent and stars; and what was that token but the Knight of Harden to Sir Gideon Murray greeting? Ay, nane less frack than Sir William would have dared such a deed, and nane but he, left his bearings behind him. Wat and Rob were more excited with the dream of overtaking and crossing swords with Harden, than grieved for our loss. Lady Murray was not a person to whom to mint straits; so I went myself to the larder and kitchen, and garred the scurls and the shakings of the oatmeal be scraped together from the ark; and sent the lasses, in place of skirling in company, to bake them into cakes and scones and white puddings. Moreover, I spiced the last well, in order that they might go further to stop waste in the tower, when, if there should be stress of weather, or if our enemy had been cunning as well as bold, we might be in the grim claught of famine before fresh provisions reached us.

'But the day was young, and they reasoned that the puir brute beasts would be loth to their hasty journey; and my father, as luck had it, had convened a score of friends that very morning to unearth foxes and otters, and any other vermin that came to hand; the big bell kept clanging, clanging, and summoned in mair and mair clansmen in need; until Sir Gideon rode out, three hours before noon, with a following of fifty and odds, fresh and stalwart riders, burning to cope with the pressed and weary Scotts, spent with their night gallop and their desperate office of guarding and goading on the cattle and flocks.

'There was not a dark cloud in the lift, only

wreaths of white vapour, scudding here and there as lightly as the merry dancers themselves; and there was a rustling over bank and brae, and flights of corbies, but ne'er a man's face, neither of shepherd nor hind, after the pursuit started; and the absence of the continual bleating of the lambs to their dams was something to make one start, so strangely dowie were the hillsides.

'"Are not ye flegged?" whimpered stout Grace; "I'm bumming round the muckle wheel to make some din. What if Harden should return, or the English march in sight? I wish it were dark, that we might na' be able to look out. I wish Elibank's horn were ringing his hamecoming, though he hied back without a cloot. I could stand being starved with the men-folk, but no being left in a garrison of women and Daddy Michael."

'Lady Murray drew out her thread in her lown corner, sternly eident, maintaining her unwavering challenge to aught in heaven or earth to move her. And I stole across the causeway, and over the hills, and up by the mossy springs. As the day waned, I clamb higher and higher, until the air blew pure and cold in my face, and there was nought between me and the lift but hill-tops on every side for scores of miles. Yonder were the peaks of the Eildons, where Wise Thomas wonned.

'I had pulled the first yellow primroses in the fringe of wood far below. I did not put them in my snooded hair, as I might have done had I been the May of Elibank. I made them into a posey and a breast-knot; and though I was dun and homely, they were fresh and honey-sweet.

'My seat commanded the hill outlets; and there as I waited and watched, I noted to the east yonder a cloud of dust, and a dark moving mass rolling along. My heart was in my mouth. I had not dared to confess to myself how Elibank's honour and life were at stake.

'The wind blew the other airt, but in the lofty solitude the routing of beasts soon reached my strained ears; that was the first welcome sign; next I distinguished two riders pricking before the lave, and I said these were Rob and Wat, come to bid us rejoice, and brag of their manhood. I sprang up, and began to speed down the heights, where one could 'maist descend in minutes what one toiled up in hours; and as I ran and ran and was half way down, I kenned Sir Gideon's crest, and next him a mounted man, whose head was bare and his hands tied tight. Well might a drow come over my joy, for that unhappy wight would pine in the dungeons of Elibank, if he did not hang from the nearest tree. But I was within sound of the shout of Daddy Michael, and the shrill jubilee of the women, and could I, a daughter of Elibank, be aught but blythe for ruth atoned for and revenged?

'I could tell the very moo, moo of my ain Crummie and Mallie, right glad to be restored to their lily pasture. The court was already full, and I crept into a canny corner. Every man, red and blowing with pride and joy, spoke and took the word from his neighbour's mouth, to tell how they had ridden suddenly upon Harden and his men crossing Hartley Burn; how they had scattered his band, and worn round the cattle; how many Scotts were

slain, and how many bound and left helpless among the heather, to the charity of the first pilgrim or monk of Dryburgh who sped that way; and grandest of all, how they took Harden's sell, fighting like a lion in the front, and brought him straight to Elibank, to suffer the penalty of his madness, and teach the Border lads how they should jest with the Murrays. In the clamour and throng there flashed back upon me, like a light from another world, my dream by the Kelpie's Pool; and there, bound and helpless, with the March wind lifting his chestnut locks, sat Sir William of Harden.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE REIVER'S TRIAL.

'"HEIZE the rope," shouted Sir Gideon, patting his good horse; "let us see how Harden will dance; he has treated us to ae measure this morning already, and by my heart, he'll leeze him on another, and it shall be his lightest and his last." The leader's words were hailed with a thunder of laughter and applause.'

They were rough riders, these Murrays, like those pretty men among whom was the savage Scotch knight who, slaying an unhappy French gentleman in open fight, cut off his head, and plaiting the long perfumed curls into his girdle, rode vauntingly with the ghastly bloody burden dangling by his side.*

* Interpolation.

'The moss-trooper blood was up; Harden was red-handed; each laird and baron was his own judge; they thought not of the young life they would take, the gallant heart they would still, but of their mortal foe, a captive to their bow and spear.

'Elibank quaffed off his bicker of wine, and he turned now, like the gentleman he was, and offered it to his prisoner.

'"Clear the stour from your craig, Harden, lad, ere it be thrawn."

'Harden took the cup in his freed hand, with a low bow, and he drank a health to Sir Gideon Murray, and his dame, and his blooming sons and daughters, and a farewell to the sun, and moon, and stars, to the steep braes and the rowing burns; and the eye-lid did not flicker nor the lip tremble.

'There he sat, in his goodly knighthood, defying Elibank and all his merry men.

'Lady Elibank stood in the hall door, calling, "Gude e'en to you, Elibank; a blythe meeting, Harden," and she swept him a curtsey.

'The men belonging to the tower were swarming like bees, unrolling a hempen coil, running it out, fixing it to the willows by the moat. I covered my face with my hands; when all at once I heard my mother bid them stay, and looked up to see her cross the court, her high-heeled shoon clattering on the rough stones, and all making way for her, until she reached my father stooping wonderingly from his saddle-bow; she tapped him on the back, and spoke in a voice of mingled malice and mockery:

'"Bide ye, Elibank, better spare the bonny lad, and wed him to our Muckle-mou'd Meg." They

could not move Harden with fear of death; she would torture him with a false, miserable blink of life and freedom. Elibank laughed his loud laugh, caught up and echoed by friend and retainer. He dropped his bridle reins, and clapped his hands, "Well spoken, dame; our Meg shall have the offer of a man, I maintain it hand and glove; puir Meg, she's above the desert of any chield in the land!"

'It was but a rough jest, or rougher good will: but, even as Elibank replied, his bushy brows knit and his cheeks grew crimson; he minded of his violet trampled in the dust, and his strong heart did not melt; it grew hard as stone, while he swore that his rue should be gathered by the brawest lad on the waters. There was a buzz of doubt and disapproval, rising into vexed clamour; but Sir Gideon was king in Elibank; and though it was retribution these armed men were balked of, there was no question, but submission to the chief.

'"Speak up, Sir William," challenged Elibank, with a fierce glee that was infectious, and in a second, like sunbeams succeeding hailstones, it supplanted the thirst for blood around; "a willing lass or a short tow?"

'"A willing lass or a short tow?" shouted each Murray, striking his neighbour, and rolling in his saddle.

'It was Harden's turn to jeer at his masters. I crouched behind the draw-well, and the boughs of the oak, and a group of riders. My woman's blood burned and boiled; I trusted I was unseen, but I heard his reply.

'"You have nae mair light Mays, Elibank; na, na, I'll kiss the gallows-tree before I pree Mucklemou'd Meg."

'"Say you so, sir; you'll have your will. Aff with the fause traitor," foamed Elibank. "Bestir yourselves, you knaves; I'll answer to King and Council!"

'There was a rush and roar; and when I next lifted my head, Harden was off his horse, and standing on the louping-on stane, Black Quentin tearing down his ruff, and a score of strong hands flung out to finish the work.

'Sir William looked up into the blue sky and down the glen; and I doubt not, but for the hills of Elibank, he saw Heriot Water, and Borthwick, and Harden Dell, and horses and hounds neighing and baying, and faithful men-at-arms looking out till their hearts were sick and sore; and again the summer wind played with his hair, and cooled his cheek.

'I forgot all, save him; how could I mind myself when this hour was to be his last—he, so young, so brave? Were the bonniest and brawest ever to be taken, and the worthless left? I pushed asunder the leafless branches of the oak tree by the well, and cried, in agony, "Harden, Harden, save yoursell."

'His blue ee flickered and fell on the spot where I stood; and, for the first time in our acquaintance, it melted as such een melt to maidens. There was a rustle of silks and a clutch at my arm, and Lady Elibank, never sparing blood of hers for the sake of fremed ears, taunted between wrath and scorn, "Ay, Meg, you fain would win a gudeman;

fain would you kep the wind when it blaws in your barn door."

'"It's false, Lady Elibank; ill betide you, woman, for a cruel mother," cried Harden's sell, with a voice like a trumpet. "It's all for me the word was spoken—for me; I recant, I recant; if any lass, black or white, thinks me so worth the haining, I'm hers. What for should I conter her? I've no truer love; and better foullest dame than the worms and the mools. Have at your Muckle-mou'd Meg. Elibank, will you stand to your pledge? I'll lead the vanguard, yet. Ay, shout my lads," cheered Harden, reckless in his yea as in his naysay. "Sir Gideon is belted knight, and cannot call himself forsworn. Keep your tow for another day; I'll e'en wed with Muckle-mou'd Meg, and jog hame to Harden."'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRIDAL.

'ELIBANK CHAPEL was swept and sprinkled and decored; banners waved and shields shone in the blazing torchlight. Sir Gideon was there in his furred robe of peace, worn in a king's presence in Holyrood, and now donned hastily; even Lady Elibank graced the sudden occasion, as if it were the fittest and freest, with her finest lawn and her richest mantle, more by token it was the sole great grace she ever showed me. Rob and Wat were light grooms, the lighter for the need to stifle doubt and dissent. After all, their sister Meg was buckled to

a gudeman at last, by the strangest luck, the wale of the borders; and Annot and the lave were blythe as only bairns can be at an unlooked-for play. It fell not to bairns to mind that bridals were whiles more doleful than burials: the last bridal at Elibank, where there had been sueing and speering and all, was it so blythe in its end, that this unlooked-for, unseemly, false wedlock should be so favoured?

'There were riders and runners that had striven in the bloody brawl at noon, content and cadgy, speeding the wild compact at sundown. Page and squire, cook and scullion, were at their wits' end promoting the banquet. Father Anthony was spirited from Melrose ere nightfall; sorely his mule was blown, and his bones shaken; but well knew his reverence the Lord Abbot that Elibank brooked no excuse; and if he hindered Harden but a day, the Scotts might try a rescue—for who so worshipped as Harden?—and there might be scorching flames for the nuptial torches, and bloody throats for the bridal liveries.

'Father Anthony was wont to be affable and pleasant, but to-day, though he came in time for the wedding feast, he was but glum company; and he groaned, ill at ease, when they made mention of bride and bridegroom.

'Would you seek that bride and bridegroom? He's yonder, bolt and bar drawn, pacing his narrow bounds; no honoured place, no holiday attire, no crouse heart, but the soiled armour and the disordered doublet suiting the face, comely in its bloom when death was at the door, now wan with vexation. Already Harden rues his hard bargain, and gnaws

his lip to think how hill and dale and both the Marches will deride the result of his flouts and his pride; he, the gayest, handsomest gallant of the borders, mated at last, mated by force, to save his neck, to the daughter of his foe—a maiden whose hard-favoured face was ken-speckle as Elibank's Muckle-mou'd Meg.

'Nurse Ailie busks the bride in her turret chamber; ay, bridesmaids, had they been summoned, would but have disgraced her swart face. Nurse Ailie bathes the begritten cheeks and smoothes the tossed hair, and plaits and pins the white broidered kirtle, so unlike the woeful wearer. How can she rebel when father and mother command; and ae resisting word may dissolve the glamour, and hang young Harden, a blue swollen corpse, above the slimy moat, to haunt her day and nicht for the lave of her days; na, his escape from the marriage vow would be but the long breath before the death groan. That bride dare not protest or pray even for an hour's respite, so she suffers doting Ailie to rejoice over her nursling being a bride "ony gate," and with a grand bridegroom; and she steals into her bosom the withered primroses, the last flowers she pulled, a grave but peaceful maiden, on the braes of Elibank.

'The procession was formed. Father Anthony walked first, with his book; Sir William led Lady Elibank by the tips of the fingers, striding along, burning to finish what should never have been begun; Elibank supported the bride, and his heart smote against his ribs at that eleventh hour because of his cruelty and his treachery to his own nature, and his own kin.

'"Take heart, my Meg; I'll ware my merks on Harden for your tocher, not that he does not owe you already triple love and duty; and he'll be the basest tyke that ever was born if he deny you your due."

'I knelt in the chapel of Elibank, side by side with Harden, as I knelt in my dream; and his head was turned as the shadow's, and so sick was my heart that I would have swarved away, but that I must repeat the vows to become his wedded wife, and redeem him from the gallows-tree.

'We were man and wife. There were mocking, mirthful huzzas of dubious portent; Elibank clasped his arms about my neck; Lady Murray wished us joy—her son as well as her daughter; and Harden cried hoarsely, "To horse, and away!" He would but break a morsel of bread, and drink a draught of wine, and quit the feast, for we had far to ride.

'None disputed his title to rise and go, nor would there have been much wisdom in seating a Scott with a host of Murrays of Elibank, to swill malt and wine till their blood was warm and their wit clogged, though the priest had just knit them into brethren.

'My head swam and my heart fluttered, but what mattered it! The leave-takings were said, the bairns began to greet, and Elibank took his last kiss, and bade Harden be gude to Meg; and Harden lifted me to the saddle, and lap before me; and his dappled grey bolted so wildly under his double burden, that, had Harden not gripped me hard and fast, I would have been flung at my father's gate, and Harden

might have been gudeman and widowed within the selfsame night.

'So Harden carried off his unsought bride. It was a fresh night, with a young moon; and like spirits we twa sped over moss and moor, across ford, by bush and stane—the road he had followed so ill a gate, though I trow we had no pursuers save our ain bitter thoughts.

'Whiles Harden muttered the ford was deep, when we sunk to the girth in a hill water; whiles, when there was a black shadow upon the path, and a scaur on the hinder side, that there was a clud atween us and the moon; but we conferred no further. I could have slipped from the horse and laid me down among the heather, but that Harden was knight and gentleman, and would not suffer such scaith; and would it niffer the pit mirk into noontide light to flee in the face of the Lord?

'But I was a dead weight on the souple grey horse, and I 'maist prayed that I would be dead ere day; and ken you, lasses, strange though it sound, there was a bitter sweetness in the deeing thus with my head on Harden's shoulder; for though he rived at his fetters that sundown, he had donned them, and sworn to scoug me thus all my days.

'But I died not, and at dawn we gained the dell. I kenned it weel; I saw it before at the Kelpie's Pool; and though the trees grew thick and black, and the road was rugged, and I was weak and weary, a glint shot across my gloom, as it were the dim face of a friend, or the sparks of a distant hope of youth and strength and better days.

'Eh! but Harden was welcome. What a tempest

of gladness after their gathering mistrust and madness; horns blawing, dogs barking, friend and follower blessing his bonny face, and gripping his saddle. Then there was a hum of wonder and scorn that filled my ears like the dregs of my black cup. But Harden was generous.

'He said not, "My men, I've lost my band, and I've brought home spoil I counted as little upon, when we rode to the harrying of Elibank, as I care for it now." But he silenced the clamour for ever and a day; he lifted me down, and he cried aloud to each Scott that he brought him his lady; as loyally he said it as if I had been the Flower of the Forest, and he had courted me from Yule to Yule. And Harden led me beneath his doorway, and whispered, "Welcome hame, Meg; we'll forget all else but what you've done for me and mine." There was a stoun in the very words he used in his mercy; but I kenned then, as I kenned ever after, that Harden, with his vanity and his wilfulness, was yet the manliest and kindest lad that ever buckled on sword and spurs, and rode out under a merry harvest moon.'

CHAPTER IX.

HARDEN DELL.

'HARDEN was a strong tower, but it was a smaller, hamelier part than Elibank; there was little there save thick walls, and the hall that was both hall and bower,—but maybe couthier and

kindlier. At least Harden himself was ever courteous to me, and none gave the hapless intruder, the Murray cast among these fremed Scotts, a rough word. There was march honour as well as march laws in these wild times, and a magnanimity that stemmed even the heart's blood of a death-feud.

'I did my best to fulfil Sir William's behests, and to employ the power put into my hands for the ordering aright of ha' and buttery, knight and knave; so that his wife should be a good wife, however gotten. In the grace of our Lady, and after the gentle sample of their master, I attained more than sufferance—goodwill and honour.

'I was a different woman in Harden from Elibank. I was Madam and Lady; and if I had had but a proud heart I might have blessed my stars, and Sir Gideon and Lady Elibank, and Harden's derring-do, and been content.

'But my heart yearned for other than pity, or even esteem; and I had a half shivering, half thrilling assurance that would never let me rest.

'It would come yet; what I had looked for since I was a pining bairn;—it would come yet, that second-sighted knowledge, that aefauld regard.

'I was as lone a wife as ever carried her ain keys at her girdle, and Harden's dark den was not like the lichtsome braes of Elibank, but I thought of my sister Mary, and then my conscience rebuked me; and I who was tried mysell, grat afresh for her; with every sign set against me, I, poor Muckle-mou'd Meg, had received an easy portion, matched with that accepted by the blue-eyed, lily-skinned, lilting-tongued May of Elibank.

'But Sir William blinded less than Sir Gideon's sell; he was ever in the saddle, not to hawk or hunt, but to harry in Fife or the Loudons; to parley with the rebel lords; or to outreach yon proud prior, till his high head seemed as unsiccar as a laigh gowan's. I doubted not but that I should ae day lament over his bluidy corpse, and sew him into his winding-sheet. Never lady had mourned her lord as I should mine; and he would have heaved a sigh for poor Meg if hers had been the lyewake, in spite of all that had come and gone; ay, even for the rending of these bonds with which he had bought life and liberty, and then cursed, as harder than the agonies of an untimely death.

'But if Sir William praised this pasty, and that spiced wine, and the screen that fenced his chair from the autumn blast, he never sat down on the same settle, or toyed with my hair, as I've seen Langshaw pull Mary's: nor trod swiftly when we met, nor lingered when we parted. He called me "Meg," "kind Meg," "good dame," but never "dear Meg;" never, never, "My Meg."

'I had fallen into a housewife skep which I was not free to take up and fling down, or cast upon stronger shoulders, at the biddin of others. I was saved from repining. I overlooked my maidens, I span lint and carded wool, and I walked in the dell, where I gathered mint and hoar hound and all-heal, and St. John's wort for the witches, and bramble berries for the tarts, each in its season, and to its proper use, till the winter snow shut us up; and on St. Valentine's Day Harden's heir came home.

'The first word that I speered at the gossip was, "Had the wean his mother's mou'?"

'"He was a brave bairn," the gossip cried, "lusty and fair." I read the answer,—the mark had descended; the banned mou', that had so soon chilled my heart. The bairn might need its douce mother, and her mother's love.

'But when Sir William returned—he had been making cheer with Thirlstane—his ringing step came straight to the chamber to see his son; and he took him in his arms and made no sign of displeasure, but telled me, "You have done weel, Meg!" and took a long pull at the posset for better luck. And from that day he never alighted off his horse without crying for the bairn; and soon the boy grew old enough to spring up at the sound of his father's voice, and to crow and caper to be made a bogle of, and buried beneath Harden's helmet; and Harden would spend a spare hour dandling him on his knee, and teaching him a pretty mimicry of blowing his horn and drawing his sword, besides keeking into his glancing steel buckler. Wee Willie had Harden's blue een and shining curls, and was a comely, pleasant child, though he was his mother's son. Ay, I've borne strapping sons and daughters, a credit to their name, and it was Heaven's will to stamp each lad or lass with some thought of that mou', in company with their father's handsome looks; but I know not that it spoiled their market, or burdened them with a hair of care. The ae man's dule is the other man's delight.'

CHAPTER X.

THE DAME'S PRIZE.

'IT came at last, what I kenned but to come—what I was tempted to long for the one minute, and flee from the next with boding terror.

'The last foreshadowed scene in my mask of life:—King Jamie was dead—one of those dark, stormy deaths ordained to the royal Stewarts. The Regent was of a house opposed to Harden's; there was bad blood between them to begin with, and lying tongues ready to broo mischief; and doubtless there were holes in my lord's doublet—what gay, stiff, gold-laced doublet wanted them of those ever ready to spur steeds and strike bold strokes for Scotland? although Harden was no mole burrowing in the dark, no fell conspirator, but frank and open as the sun.

'The long and the short was, that a warrant of treason was issued against Harden, and a wheen else besides—of treason, for contravening the Regent and trafficking with his enemies, and threatening to raise the young King's standard. I ken not how much was truth, and how much malice in the charge, but it was pursued with such dark and deadly aim, that we heard not of pursuivant and spearmen, and an army marching behind to back them, until it was too late to rally the clan, or muster our neighbours and fellow-sufferers.

'Harden cried first to man the tower and die on its walls in his harness, like a gallant knight and

soldier; for where were the beeves to feed us, or the men-at-arms at hand to stand to the defence, that we might come out triumphant after a siege from a Regent's army? There would be but a blast of defiance and folly from arquebuss and bow, till shafts and shot were exhausted, and they thought it worth while to bring up their war-engines; sullen gaps, with no men to bale out the assailants, slashing in the face of the defenders, till few were left to head or hang. But even as Harden flung on his gorget, he paused, and he looked round on his grey tower and his white-haired seneschal, and his merry imp of a page, and his handful of stout followers, so sternly prepared to die with their chief; and he rose up slowly for Harden, and he cast off his gauntlets and laid down his helmet, and he said sedately to his wondering listeners, "We'll not ding down the old wa's; we'll not spill blood wastefully. Keep the tower and your service, my men, for my young son; I'll e'en make my head pay its own forfeit; there's no great loss save to poor Meg."

'No prayers nor entreaties would move him. The time for flight was past; we had sure tidings that the bloodhounds were out, and the passes guarded. Then I preferred my petition. I led him to the tower summit, and I showed him the piles of flax for my winter's darg, and I bound myself with wild assurance to carry out the strategy. He had little will to hiding; he fumed at it as lurking like a rat in the dark, and maintained that they would set a low to the flax and smoke him like bees in a bink. But I minded him of great King David, when Saul's daughter laid an image in his bed; and I begged and

implored, until I wearied him into consent; still he hesitated to lie down in his strange bed, even after the friendly beacon was lit and blazing on Hazelhope. He would bless his little son, the tender sprout of a lofty tree; he would leave to a little child his bauld name and his dangerous heritage; and ay, he counselled, "Grow up, Wee Willie, to be a stout man and preserve the honour and might of Harden; and serve Buccleugh with horse and man, head and hand; and fear nought, save God; and be kind to your mother, Willie, that's kindest to you."

'The autumn red and brown was on the rowans and beeches, the corn of the croft was yet yellowing in the September sun; but Harden never looked beyond his high turrets, his heart was within; he had taken farewell of the world without, once already, langsyne—he had no second leave-taking to spare to it now. "Oh, Harden, Harden, lie down, or you hae lost the last chance for dear life;" but he started up on his knees, and gripped my hand, and looked wistfully in my face; "Meg," he said, "puir Meg, I doubt I've been but a loon after all:" and then he swore my een were the marrow of his hound's that the boar tore, and that looked up into his face, and licked his hand, and died; and then he threeped for a hasp of my black hair for his last love-token, to lie on his heart when they pierced it through. Oh, was there maist rapture or woe in his wild words? But yonder the pennon was waving, and the spears gleaming, and my destiny—the destiny of my gudeman—was in my hand, as Tam Lane's, yon mirk night and lonesome road, in Lady Janet's, in the truth that makes us weak women baulder than the foul fiend.

'I bore my part; my tongue never faltered, my ee never fell, my colour never blanched; I stopped to bann the careless slut that spilt the foaming milk from her bowie. I bade them rest and refresh themselves; and when the leader, smarting under his failure, spoke with scant ceremony, "My dame, I red you grow hemp now in place of flax, for there are more strong ropes needed for traitors' craigs than Holland sarks for their backs," I answered with unbroken spirit, "There are no traitors clad with Harden flax; lift up the stalks, sirs, and look." The test was ended—the sair test was ended—the sair test that, had I not been strengthened to defy it, would have left me a widowed woman, more hapless and demented than she who bore her knight's body on her back, and howkit his grave and laid him in; and sure as death, Harden kissed the blessed tears off my cheeks as plain as he did in the far-off dream; and was I not a happy woman that night, and comforted for every care, when I walked with Harden through the gloaming wood, and he telled me, "My Meg, twice hained is aye gained; I ken, now, how soon I would have wearied of a lily skin and a brent broo; but a true heart and wise wit bind withs that Samson couldna burst; and your pleading een, and your clear broo, and your very mou', your muckle, honest, canny mou,' have long been growing fair to me, sweet Meg?" And ever on from that day's danger, Sir William, though no Scott that I could hear tell of, had yet a drap of coward's blood in his veins, abode more at hame, in peace, honour, and happiness, in his own tower of Harden.'

THE LAIRD'S SEAM.

CHAPTER I.

AN old tumbledown house, which had been white but was now relieved by sundry grass-green patches, stood, seventy years ago, at the end of a short, straight avenue running through a belt of Scotch firs; beyond it, all around stretched as bleak and rushy moorland as ever clad the poor wards of Lanark. The house was not without pretension: it aimed at being a small place—a laird's mansion; but it had no air of prosperity, from its name of Watery Butts (and the winter rain lay weeks in the furrows of its sour, stiff clay soil) to the grey stones rent and shattered upon its steep roof, the lintels of the small battered windows defaced and worn, the wooden work crumbled down, and the battered door opening with two leaves like a cupboard. Within there was the same evidence of narrow means or waning fortunes: the sitting-room, originally panelled, was destitute of all more modern pretensions to elegance,

or even comfort; the bare carpet of thick, grey woollen stuff was not superior to what might be met with in the best room of the one-story farmhouse built on the first arable farm beyond these moors; the table was of wainscot, and in the light of the hearth a young woman, with homely striped skirts, and keys at her side as the mistress of the house, sat spinning yarn from a dark polished wheel.

The mansion might have fallen into the hands of tenant owners of the humbler class,—moorland farmers only raised a step above their cottars—but for the central figure, a man of sixty, poring, with keen eyes whose lashes were white as snow, over the cobwebbed, yellow papers of the drawers in an ancient bureau mounted on spindle legs and planted by the window, occasionally laying them down to handle with his big, bony hands a few dull chipped stones contained in the recesses of the repository, and compare them with a rough basket at his feet filled with the same smutty material. The coarse plaiden coat, the weighty peasant shoes, the tangled grey hair, no more degraded their owner than the ponderous, clumsy, dim frame can overshadow a work of the painter's art.

The October sun, now setting behind these dreary tracks, shot its rays through the dispersed, erect, black pines, and piercing the lozenged panes, fell upon the Laird of Watery Butts, dreaming his phantasy; and a broad, furrowed brow of genius was Ringan Cockburn's, with sharp features, and eyes of wonderful fire looking out beneath their silvery brows. There was nobleness about Ringan Cockburn that no poverty could clog, youth that no

old age could quench. He was musing earnestly, with a flush rising upon his sunken cheek: suddenly he threw down stones and papers, sat erect in his leather-covered elbow chair, and called 'Thrift,' in tones of cheery command.

Thrift Cockburn—twice Thrift Cockburn, the old Laird's daughter and only child, and at five-and-twenty the composed wife of the laird's nephew and heir, a Cockburn of a younger branch of the same gnarled tree—obeyed the summons; and there side by side, as if for comparison, were the starry light of science—all the purer that it was less a thing of facts than of conviction, that it was idealized in its lifelong struggle against groping ignorance and cumbersome difficulties—and the lowlier, commoner more blessed beam of household love, lifting as with angel's wings the simple, unreasoning, instinctive nature to the higher, stronger spirit within whose circle it had flourished—as if the little social moorland lark had fluttered fearlessly to the plumed breast of the lonely, royal eagle. Thrift Cockburn was no exemplification of the somewhat hard-fisted, homely virtue, once so esteemed on Scotch lips that it crept into a Christian appellation, pronounced with a benediction over tiny, unconscious faces in many a heathery nook, from the Solway to the highland-born Forth and Tay. Thrift Cockburn was tall and shapely, with a round, dimpled face, like a scarlet-streaked apple in the Bothwell orchards, and eyes bluer than the 'flower of the flax,' which she bade her Wat sow. It was a kindly, blithe face, with its own peculiar bloom, that neither mildew nor rust could wear away—that would survive the carle time

and care with the best, and whose little lines of wilfulness never for a moment combated with the great reverence that nestled under her curch as beneath her maiden snood. Thrift Cockburn could dare her domestic, long-legged, red-headed Jean; or ban the dark vagabond gipsy that would fascinate her with his evil eye, while his tattered comrade lifted her griddled cakes or her 'grey cock;' and soundly shake her little urchin when he meddled with his grandfather's treasures, his dried weeds, or his stones and rude wooden models. But she had faith that never doubted her manly Wat—faith that could lift mountains and cast them into the sea for her grey-haired father, the beggared Laird of Watery Butts.

'Thrift,' the Laird addressed her with confident congratulation, 'I see my way as clear as day. When the pit's down, your fortune's won.'

'Do you say so, father!' replied Thrift, with answering gladness, as if she had not heard the same story fifty times; 'I'm blithe to hear it; not but I can bear puirtith, but you're growing auld, and Wat will lay aside the plough and ride with his marrows, and wee Wat will grow up to a grand inheritance; and you shall be honoured as the doer of all and the benefactor of the country-side, never to be lichtlied more. I'm glad that you've fand the seam.'

'It's no found, lassie,' interrupted the Laird, hastily; 'only sure to be; the metals are the same, and they take the very dip, and I canna be baffled by another hitch. No!' said Ringan Cockburn, striking the table with his broad hand, and speaking with a prophet's glowing certainty; 'the victory's won. I see the hill-head, with the blocks of hard,

clean coal—it's parrot, Thrift, as I'm a living man —binged house-high, and the train of carts with their Clydesdale mares, and the stout carters bending beneath their load, and whistling and cracking their whips as they drive away to their ten miles' distant homes, and the black-a-viced, souple miners swinging in the tubs, and receiving their bright silver groats at the week's end. My word, the Laird of Briary Wood, with its waving holms of wheat and barley, wad fain niffer with the Laird of Watery Butts; such a hairst he will reap from his peat hags, as Briary Wood and all his generation niver saw. We'll rebuild the old house, Thrift; we'll have policies and herb gardens and pleasure gardens. Young Wat will get College learning, and sit in the London Parliament, and maintain the rights of Scotland, and counsel King George; and, lassie, I'll lay down my weary banes and dee in peace.'

'Dinna speak o' deein', father,' cried Thrift, 'with fortune at the door: gin Wat were but in to hear the news.'

'They have termed me a fule and a madman, Thrift,' continued Ringan Cockburn, unheeding her; 'gentle and simple have charged me with wasting your means; they have said I would bring you to want and misery, and now, with the Lord's will, their children's children will owe me their bread.'

'The Lord has blessed you, father,' exclaimed Thrift, devoutly; 'he has given to you to return gude for evil.'

'He gave me a gude bairn, Thrift,' responded her father, affectionately, 'that never failed me in my

troubles, and that can now rejoice wi' me when my jewel's won.'

'Father,' pleaded Thrift, wistfully, 'Wat never said you nay.'

The Laird patted her comely cheek and smiled. 'Wat's a long-sighted chap, and has a wife and a wean to protect, and he's been patient, forby eydent; I'm content.'

'But when will the coal be howkit, and the country side tell'd, and crowns in place of bodles in our purse?' demanded Thrift.

The Laird looked down reprovingly. 'Bairn, Rome wasna built in ae day—it's a far cry to Loch-awe—yet it's yonder, Thrift, ayont the blue hills; I saw it aince, and its wild swans and kilted clans, when I was a laddie, and Rob Roy yet brattled ower the vale of Menteith, and there was word of axes and claymores instead of picks and shools. The pit is not sunk to its last fathom, there maun be gude hire to transform mair hedgers and ditchers into miners and banksmen, and but a cauld coal to blow at in the mean time.' The Laird reflected. 'Ay, it's never darker than afore dawn.'

Thrift's gleeful face fell, though she strove not to be daunted, and would cling to the bright certainty that had been presented to her, for one moment, to be wrested the next from her grasp.

'It will be but a few shifts mair, father, and when Wat is convinced that success is so nigh——'

The Laird's brow contracted. 'Wat's honest, but he is dull, and he grows thrawn, and it is ill to stoop to my younger brither's orphan son.'

'Oh! father, dinna blame Wat; he wad work or

want for you, ony day; but he's ower anxious and he's ill-advised,' pleaded Thrift, faithfully.

'And my arms are stiff, and the day's gone by, when there was no want o' hands to maw the hay, and cut the oats, and big the peats for the Maister of Watery Butts; and my fellows look askant on me at kirk and at market, and hold puir Wat no better than a grieve or a ploughman, and wonder at his puir spirit that jowks to my maggots. That's the way o't, Thrift, and sirs, it's high time it were ended.'

A new impulse swayed Thrift; she threw her arms round her father's neck: 'How daur they, father, how daur they?' she sobbed, 'you that were aye ower gude and wise, and never waured a plack on ae sin, and laboured for the weal o' ane an a'. Oh, how can they?'

The Laird clasped his hands, and looked straight before him with frank pride. 'Ay, Thrift, I showed them how to bore the well at the Pends; I bade Willie Lumsden straw lime on his barren rigs, and this day they bear twofold. I planted scores o' elms and beeches that "will grow when we are sleeping," and wave their green tops when Wat and you are threescore; I have built a mill, though my red land's no great; I've had neep seed and grass seed frae foreign lands; the best is but little, but I've done my best—though I impoverished myself to enrich the beechen bog that's a slough of despond to this hour; and the yellow sandstones of my quarry were mauverish as snuff ere they had been months exposed to sun and wind.'

'And you have dealt aumouses, father, to the sick

and infirm; and you gave your barn to the tramping preacher that Briary Wood and Clay Gates drove off their lands.'

CHAPTER II.

THE Laird had donned his grey cloak and blue bonnet, and was out in the tempestuous October twilight, plodding, with bent head, but unrelaxing foot, to the ruddy fire that, like a beacon at sea, burned night and day on one spot on the waste, there to hold his vigil.

> The summer had been cold and wet,
> And stuff was unco green.

And on the moorlands of Watery Butts the hardy reapers were yet cutting down the crop that, in spite of the Laird's experiments, the winter snow might surprise a-field. Wat Cockburn was superintending their labours.

Thrift's satellite, Jean, was an out-worker. Thrift was alone at her warm hearth, the windows rattling and the clouds drifting without—alone save for little Wat, who sat in his corner marshalling flocks and herds of the dry, brown, empty husks of field-peas, and knobbed fir-tops. Thrift span and pondered, rose to set the great pot on the kitchen fire, and to mingle and stir its warm wholesome mess; but it was not of the tired harvest hands she thought, or even of Wat's coming in cold and hungry from his day's toil. Thrift dwelt upon her father's words with the pertinacity of a temper early imbued with a portion of the Laird's ardour, and an affection

made up of respect and protecting fondness. The Laird had been an abstracted, singular, scheming man all his life; and, in spite of the unselfishness of his motives and actions, and the occasional flashes of good fortune which he caught, he was demurred at by his contemporaries, as men, like water, will love a dead level, and an old channel. Thrift knew better. Thrift honoured him far more than if he had been proven worldly-wise, instead of crack-brained. Thrift was fond of him as one is fond of an object peculiarly his own, with wants and weaknesses to be softly covered with a holy mantle. In many respects (whisper it not in the ears of sultans) Thrift was more engrossed with her father than her husband, although she had married Wat from true love, and was a faithful, tender wife, because Wat was independent of her—Wat was strong, she but his weaker help-meet.

Thrift studied and re-studied her household resources; she would fain aid her father in his strait, contribute to the remotest chance of his fulfilling his long-proclaimed feat. The peril and precariousness of his undertaking had its own hold on her woman's imagination; she felt (but probably in a keener degree) like royal Isabella, when she pledged her crown jewels and bestowed the moneys on the voyager Columbus. Blessings on woman's faith! It may have stranded many a deluded bark, but it has also landed many a good ship—the rudder gone, the hold sprung a leak. But Thrift was sorely puzzled, her means were so very small, and there were holes innumerable for the price of the first sold grain; there were servants' wages, and needful repairs, and gro-

ceries, and wearing apparel, besides old accounts to be looked after. Wat, too, had long disapproved of the Laird's proceedings, and now it was scarcely to be hoped that, in order to promote them in their extremity, he should again relinquish the better part of his particular earnings, and the capital on which the family depended for all foreign aid during the long winter. Wat was so twitted for facility of temper and weakness of will by his thoughtless, complacent acquaintances, that he might be driven to assert his prerogative to the utmost.

At last a project occurred to her, though it was humble—so humble that the little bit of pride in Thrift's warm heart cried out against it, and had to be silenced by the brave doctrine to which she had listened from childhood—that honest means, however plain and poor, are dignified and graced the moment they are applied to a high end.

'My father and Wat, though Watery Butts and its title deeds have belonged to our forbears sin' the memory of man, have not thought shame to cast their coats mony a day, and slave for me. I will put on my red mantle, and fill my basket with butter, and eggs, and young chickens, and hanks of yarn, and maybe some napery, and carry it into the merchants of Ravenston. I haena' mony acquaintances to foregather wi', and what need I heed though they say there's the Leddy o' Watery Butts forced, puir woman, to bode away her own gear like ony cadger's wife tramping in' wi' her creel? Jean canna be spared, and wad mak no bargain. I see na, though I were a warlock, how else I could earn a penny.'

Thrift would conceal her simple device from the Laird; she would start in the morning before he was astir, but overnight she must confide it to Wat, and obtain his consent. She first settled the minutiæ of her plan, as she spun by her lamp, while Wat read his old newspaper and attended to the horse suppering. After her father had returned from 'the sinking,' and partaken of the frugal supper; when Jean, leading her male squad of ploughboy and herdboy, had entered, to profit by 'the worship,' which rose so quaintly and soothingly—Thrift's clear voice leading the psalm, Wat's deep notes chiming in, Ringan's impressive broken bass uttering lofty verse and reverent prayer;—then, when servants were dismissed; and Ringan had retired to rest; and little Wat, with his brown cheek pressed against his pillow, and his chubby hand still grasping his fir-tops, slept the dreamless sleep of infancy; and Thrift and Wat sat beside their own ingle, and talked in the fearless confidence of man and wife, heart knit to heart in the closest, kindest bonds—then Thrift unfolded her little secret, and pleaded her cause with her hand on Wat's knee, and her blue eyes on his face. But Wat's ear had been poisoned, and his heart steeled; his very love for the speaker hardening him the more against her enterprise.

Wat Cockburn was thoroughly frank, manly, and true-hearted, as he was a handsome fellow, with a warm Gothic tint of complexion and hair, but he had Gothic traits in mind as well as body: he was not bright, he was not deep, he was rather slow, poor fellow, in intellect, though excitable in temper; and like most people who acquire an idea by inches and

frequently at second-hand, he was exceedingly hard to dispossess of a notion once imbibed: he was apt to be stubborn. With all sincere regard for the Laird, he had allowed himself to be convinced that the Laird's perpetual draining, planting, building, and boring, was an infatuation which, with his declining finances and the nature of Watery Butts, would land the household in ruin.

Now the Laird could do what he chose with his own, but with Wat lay what might be called the executive power exerted on the fields; besides, when he first came to Watery Butts from another county, to introduce himself to his relations, and to be won by and win Thrift, he had sunk his little patrimony on the family property—and Ringan Cockburn, with all his scheming, was simple and candid as a child in admitting another man's claims, however they might interfere with the consuming pursuit of the phantoms of his busy brain. For the last few months there had been a secret struggle at Watery Butts, almost harder to suffer than open contention, seeing that it was between those who had till now been kith and kin in heart as well as blood: stolid opposition, grudging concessions, from Wat, met by impatience and half scorn and soreness of spirit from the Laird;—Wat growing ever more dogged, the Laird more resentful, only Thrift, like a house-pigeon, flying between. Perhaps Wat, manly as he was, had his own unsuspected littleness in the matter of Thrift's enamourment of her father; at least, it was as his Thrift that he would not hear of her journey to Ravenston, a seller not a buyer; it should never be said that he could not support his wife by the

sweat of his brow; that while Watery Butts was theirs, or he retained the use of his stout hands, she was driven to such shifts.

It was in vain that Thrift reminded him that, according to country tradition, Sir Allan's daughter who had wedded a Cockburn in their palmy days, on the temporary forfeiture of their estate during historical reverses, a misfortune from which they never recovered—better the whole had gone than the restoration of the mere haggs of Watery Butts—the widow and her daughters had for a time maintained themselves by plaiting rush mats in a neighbouring cottage.

Wat would acknowledge no precedent: there was necessity in their case, but none in hers; she might be thankful while he was spared. For the Laird and his maggots, he was a good man, but he was flying in the face of Providence; it was time he listened to reason.

Thrift was keenly mortified and disappointed. She longed to abet her father in his need; she could not bear that Wat should secede to the side of his detractors; she piqued herself on her influence with Wat, and this was the first time that it had failed since he came amongst them, so strapping and sincere, so industrious and affectionate, since they held their trysts where the purple iris and the golden marsh marigold gave a July splendour to the lonely water stealing across the grey moor; and Thrift remembered sundry rash pledges and doting declarations into which even sober Wat Cockburn had plunged in the height of his malady, and felt a very ill-used and indignant woman sitting with her arms

tightly crossed, and her eyes smarting in the fire-light, with Wat at her side, one great block of cold cruel opposition, yet glancing shyly down at her, and inwardly groaning under the smiting of his conscience—for the vanquished do not always bear away the only or the severest wound in the conflict.

CHAPTER III.

THRIFT, whose humours were wont to be passing vapours, under this provocation both lay down and rose up in bitterness. Wat was off ere she awoke, while there was yet a star in the bleak morning sky, to marshal his troop, and to see them whet their sickles before he returned for breakfast. The Laird was abroad, too, striding, early as it was, to his Will-o'-the-wisp on the moor—so completely the centre of his aspirations, that if it should be quenched, Thrift felt as if the very lamp of life, that still burned so brightly in the old student of nature's making, would leap up and sink in premature darkness.

Thrift went sullenly about her household duties, was listless and careless about her usual brisk business, soundly rebuffed little Wat when he was attacked with a refractory desire to continue dabbling in the water from which he had emerged, in order to proceed with the next stages of his toilette, sending him shaking with defiant little sobs, to stand with his smeared face turned to the chamber wall. At length breakfast was ready; and catching little Wat by the hand, to drag him from the demon fire, Thrift issued

into the raw air, traversing the little fir wood, swaying in the morning breeze, and turning her steps to the pit, in order to summon her father to his morning meal. There was an unusual stir about the working, and Thrift paused on the first knowe to watch the scene. There it lay, so close to her that she could not only distinguish the actors, but hear their words. There were the heaps of hardened, trampled-down slaty shale, and limestone surrounding the smouldering peat fire—there the black yawning cavity, in which treasures more potent than diamonds might lie buried —there the rude machine that creaked round and round, dragged by the old grey pony, with his dizzying mechanical pace, and the crick in the neck he seemed to have acquired in his endless circles. The whole had a cheerlessness, and a dismal, crumbling aspect, that seemed to eschew gain, and to pertain to disaster and decay, and agreed with the cold October sky, and the flat which it overlooked.

But in place of the slouching, lounging figure or two that waited on the ascent of the tub, and emptied its contents, and the one stationary man who contemplated their labours, there was a little knot of excited workmen, remonstrating against the solitary voice of command, they yet hesitated to disobey.

The Laird stood erect and still, extending his arm and giving his orders clearly and distinctly as ever he had done in his life.

'Unyoke the pony, and you, Simon Moys, lead him ower to Claygates; his wind's sair spent, but his back's no broken, and he'll supply the place of the gude grey mare that fell wi' the full cart and broke hir hough-bane last night; the lave, e'en gang

into the gin, and yoke to the trams, and pull shouther to shouther till noon.'

The men looked at each other rebelliously, and then a spokesman came forward a pace, and addressed Ringan Cockburn—'It may be neeborlike, Laird, for you to lend a hand to Claygates wi' the corn no in, and Martimas nigh,' he said, grumblingly, but respectfully, as men will respect those who have self-respect written broadly, even in furrows and bleached hair; 'and I'll say we would be sweer to resist your bidding, for you're a just master and a kind; and some o' us hae been born and bred on your land; but to render ourselves brute beasts to pleasure you, and work out your dreams, is mair than ony mortals could accord.'

There was an acquiescent murmur from his companions, followed by a pause. The Laird lifted his hand to his brow, and then looked in the rough weather-beaten face of the ringleader with bright, unflinching eyes, without a contortion of passion or shame disturbing a muscle of his own countenance.

'Man, Simon,' he said, simply and composedly, 'yer so far richt, I would be neeborlike in the hairst to Claygates, were it in my power, but I am sair straitened for siller; I'm sending off puir Rory, whose forbear I rode when I was a laddie, no to help Claygates, but to bring me a last pound-note or the coal be found.'

The men stirred and stared in blank dismay, and then broke into a unanimous outcry—

'Gie in, Laird, howk nae deeper; ye've waured ower muckle already; the day's dead set against you; and you'll never licht a spunk frae that hole.'

But the Laird's voice bore down the clamour, like a bugle call, such a rallying sound was in its dauntless words—'Gie in, when the hard battle's fought and victory won—the fuel that shall blink on our hearthstanes and gladden them, and raise mair biggins on Watery Butts than there are anns on a barley head! Doubt Providence, while he's left ae twig to hing on by! Yer mistaen, lads;' and casting off his coat, Ringan Cockburn laid his own hands on the poles, as if the might of his spirit alone would impel dull wood and rusty iron. But the men were shamed for the moment, and inspired with a common reaction. 'Na, Laird,' they said confusedly, pushing forward, 'we'll no fail you now. We'll stick by you anither day, though we be to replace Rory; wha kens but this may be the last bout, and something may be in't?' and, as if they had been oracles, these rude impulsive men, while they pulled round the machine with right good will, a faint hollow call, repeated and prolonged, rose from the pit-mouth. Was it, after all, the proclamation of great tidings,—had the last mine been driven to victory—the planting of the standard on new fields that were to render unfavoured Watery Butts opulent and famous? The men tugged and strained till drops started on their toil-worn brows, and a strange fire of kindled expectation glowed in their eyes. The Laird stood firm, with but a tighter contraction of the sagacious lip, and an unconscious lowering of the white eyebrows, but how the great heart within must have panted and prayed!

No tub containing the smallest fragment of the long-sought, much-coveted mineral, whether in slaty

layers or shining lumps—a white scared face, how unlike the harbinger of fortune and thanksgiving—a hoarse voice, calling out wildly, 'Row, for God's sake, there's twa forby me, and the sides o' the mine are cracking like the ice on Cambus Loch.'

The fated words were scarcely uttered, the tottering feet landed, when a hollow rumble, like the roar of surf, a muffled, sharp report, like the crack of a volley of musketry, a concussion of the solid earth beneath their feet, followed—a cloud of dust rising from that great yawning grave, and men's hearts—quailing, ebbing for a second—flowing back in a wail and lament of horror and woe.

'Laird, Laird!' called Simon Moys, clutching his master by the arm, and confronting him with dire accusation in his appalled, wrathful face, 'ye tempted the Lord, wha had gien us the braid peat moss and bidden us be content, and his curse has fallen for your sin on innocent heads.'

Ringan Cockburn spurned the touch, and the red blood returned to his white lips as he shouted for spade and shovel, and clutched the rope hanging over the pit-mouth. Much need was there of a leader's presence of mind, of immediate, vigorous action; for, work as their comrades might, with the strength of brotherhood yearning over their fate—let the whole country side be arrested to relieve their strenuous exertions, it would be mirk night before these human bodies could be drawn from the pile of sand and stones heaped high above the rock, where they struck their picks, living, life-like men that morning.

Women, with their fluttering gowns and shawls,

were appearing in many a meandering line across the moor, trudging to the work with their pitchers and baskets, conveying breakfast to husbands and sons terribly engaged. At the first suspicion of the evil, they flocked in, tossing their arms and screaming in sore distress. For, who were the sufferers? What wretched wife or mother was to find her own in that buried pair, gone forth from them in strength and security—to win their bread—to shelter and cherish them—to be praised or abused, never more?

Lawrie Blair, the wild but good-natured prodigal, whom the Laird had so often forgiven, the sole support of the fractious, ailing mother, who was continually bemoaning his sins—and there she was, she who had not walked half the distance for years, already apprised of the calamity—stumbling along, her feeble hands twitching at her neckerchief, or check apron.

'Oh, Lawrie, Lawrie, hae ye come to this? Laird, Laird, save the lad that wad hae deed for ye afore the doucest an' decentest man in your employ,—that has deed for you! Wae's me, wae's me! Had ye lived but a ditcher, my bairn, like your faither afore you, ye wad hae been to the fore through mony anither spree.'

Thrift took her by the hand and found a seat for her on the grass, and tried to tell her to take heart, for Lawrie was in the Lord's hand, even in that overwhelmed pit, and that he had been found at his post of duty, though it was but a miner's shift.

CHAPTER IV.

A MURMUR was spreading among the workers, paralyzing their efforts; glances of far deeper commiseration, and distress—a hundredfold shot around; Simon Moys again stood out, and taking off his cap, communicated something reluctantly and hesitatingly to the Laird. Ringan Cockburn staggered, and looked up piteously to the leaden sky. No—no. It could not be!

'Father,' said Thrift, joining him, and suddenly aware of a strange overlook, 'why is Wat not here? Send him and the bandsters word; they'll take their turn wi' the miners. Wat will do the work of two men, ay, however grieved he may be to see this sight.'

'Let alane, Thrift, my woman,' replied the Laird, weakly. 'Wat's housing the sheaves, and he could do no gude here; you see there's no room for the folk already. There's relays upon relays; let a' be.'

'Housing the sheaves when men's lives are to save!' Thrift remonstrated indignantly. 'Father, ye dinna ken what you say, or how sair ye wrang Wat. I'll run for him myself.'

'Bide still, Thrift; bide here, I command you,' the Laird exclaimed, violently. Thrift was thunderstruck; she looked at her father, shaking in every limb, his fine tranquil face working with emotion. She caught the glances of the others, now turned from Tib Blair, sitting rocking herself on the moor, all directed to herself with the same inexpressible

gentleness and solemnity beaming so strangely from those familar, homely faces. The truth gleamed upon her, the awful fact that Wat, vexed by her pain and resentment, had risen from his bed; and, as if possessed by a dark fate, had gone where he had not been for weeks, to the pit-head; and, before the main portion of the workmen assembled, had borrowed a miner's tools and descended the shaft—either seized with a wild superstitious notion of trying his individual luck in the costly and condemned speculation—or with a calmer purpose of attempting to satisfy himself by actual eyesight, whether it held out the least glimmering of the result on which the Laird yet pinned his faith.

Stiff and stark, or uttering stifled groans of mortal anguish, fathoms beneath their feet, crushed and concealed in a living grave, with the clods and stones heaped on his uncoffined, unshrouded breast, lay comely, kind Wat Cockburn, the husband and father, in the flush and promise of his manhood.

Thrift's blue eyes glared upon the witnesses, her white cheek grew a purple red, and she dropped down at her father's feet, clasping his knees, and writhing before him: 'Gie me back Wat, father; I gave you all else, the bite from my bairnie's mouth, but not Wat, never Wat!'

Oh, hapless king of Israel, who rent thy royal robe at the mocking mandate of the imperious Syrian, here is a man more tortured and abased, as if he too were 'a god to kill and to make alive;' and one of the wretched suppliants his pleasant child, Thrift, a young bride three twelvemonths back.

Not sorrow alone, but remorse, is cankering and

maddening the cordial, happy nature, convulsing and transforming each feature as if an evil spirit had possessed itself of the fair body.

'Oh, Tib Blair, ye hae flyted on Lawrie mony a day, but ye parted friends at last; I tell you a' standing there, I gloomed on my Wat, my gude, sober, kind gudeman, my dear, dear Wat, I, an ill wife, a hard heart, I braggit him till, against his better judgment, he gaed down the pit, and met his death this day.'

Yes, this will be the fearful burden of Thrift's sad widowhood, the blight that will alight upon her this moment, and haunt her sunk, searching eyes—her hair with not one or two slight threads, but whole flakes of silver breaking its brown before the October day be done, and she but a matron of twenty-five—until her dying moment, be it near or far; that there had been discord between her and Wat Cockburn on that last night, in the cheerful light of their quiet hearth; that he had risen and gone out of his house in the grey morning, without one word of reconciliation and reviving regard exchanged between them. They who loved each other so truly, who were one flesh in the blessed bands of holy wedlock!

Thrift's first paroxysm of despair soon sunk in exhaustion, and with hands and heart cold and heavy as lead, she sat as still as Tib Blair. Another hand led away the innocent, ignorant, daunted child, or forced refreshment upon the Laird. Now that he was gone, taken from her so suddenly and fearfully, Thrift cared for none but Wat Cockburn.

Many a strong arm that had dug with grim application gave way; the shades of evening fell chill on

these wastes; by the red smoky light of lanterns, the Laird looked haggard and aged as some patriarch —God-forsaken like Job—before there was a halt, a shout, and the signal that the lost were found.

The men clustered together, an agitated ring; the women hid their faces, and sobbed anew with bitter violence. A board had been fixed above the ordinary tub, and upon it a man was ascending, with a dark mass resting at his feet; slowly and cautiously they wound the rope until they were almost on a level with the bystanders. The lights fell on a great crimson stain, and every breath in the circle was drawn hard and short.

'There's life in him yet; but howd him frae his mither.'

Life! what a power there is in that sound, though it be but a vapour fluttering in its flight, expiring in fitful, tortured flashes. Life! how the name alone can heal the broken heart, and revive energies, strange and wonderful as humanity can display. Tib Blair rose up strengthened, and followed on her own feet the shapeless, bruised form. Was not her Lawrie still in life, and might not a merciful Providence spare him, maimed and helpless, for her, his old mother, to tend and succour — for whom her feeble fingers could spin day and night—to whom she would never again give crabbed, spiteful answers? A wild imagination, but still a ray of hope to lighten the miserere of the bereaved heart. And how Thrift Cockburn coveted that poor burden, and what would she not have given to have received her Wat thus!

Another interval of suspense, brief, but to those who endured it—a very life-time, sickening,

heart-rending: a few more shovelsful thrown from the hill of stony mould which never seemed to decline—and the second watched for token that their weary task was ended. Thrift would not be kept back by any force, but she stood still, rigid rather, in the centre of the group. There was no disorder or disfigurement of Wat's members, scarcely even of his dress; his head was thrown back with a stately air, the features fully exposed; but oh! the repose on the face, as if the burden and heat of the day had been borne, great strife, perhaps, passed through; a wrestling for dear life, and those dearer than life—but all toil and suffering over. Simon Moys, and other than he, turned aside, but Thrift did not waver—the spectacle was so solemn, it soothed rather than harrowed her—for it was yet like a vision, grief-laden, but majestic, to the poor, pierced, spirit-wrung girl; and all the sign she gave, or emotion she testified, was a single quiet whisper of terrible egotism!

'Ay, Wat, my man, I wad hae seen the hale warld lie there sooner than you!'

But a slight trembling stirred Wat Cockburn's benumbed limbs; a tinge of red flickered on his blanched cheek; the eyes they had believed shut for ever, opened and gazed around with a confused, unmeaning, uncertain lustre, clearing slowly, until they rested on Ringan Cockburn; and then suddenly brightening with a flash of intelligence, a world of knowledge which they struggled to convey, a contrition softening them inexpressibly, a magnanimous, generous congratulation, an honest, affectionate trust.

'Laird,' said Wat, with his first choked, stuttering accents, 'the coal's won!'

Sure enough, Wat's clenched hand yet retained a precious fragment of the coal seam, laid bare at last, at such a time, and under such circumstances.

God's arm had been over the pair in the recesses of the shaken pit, directing the course of the avalanche, which stunned and smote, but did not slay; turning aside the danger, imminent and deadly: and the cherished desire, the long look forward of Ringan Cockburn's busy life, was achieved; the swarming, diffused, exhaustless prosperity of Watery Butts was secured to his latest descendants.

No more pinching poverty and disheartening struggles — no more thwarting and decrying — no more mockery and contempt: perhaps, for their future moderation and peace, Wat Cockburn and Thrift needed the fiery ordeal of that miserable October day to precede the change in their fortunes; but to Ringan Cockburn, in that sense, it was unnecessary. He was too truly great to be elated by triumph, any more than he had been depressed by discomfiture and failure; though he smiled on the happiness of others, and rested on his noble, peaceful laurels.

A WOOING AND WEDDING OF 17—.

CHAPTER I.

'ABONNY bride's sune buskit; eh, Nanny Swinton?'

'But ye're no bonny, Miss Nelly na, na, ye canna fill the shoon o' yer leddy mother, yer snod, and ye may shake your tails at the Assembly, but ye're far ahint Lady Carnegie.'

'An I've but to dance my set with young Berwickshire Home, I care not though I bide at home after all.'

But Nelly Carnegie would have little liked that resource, though she now flung the powder out of her nut-brown hair, and tapped her little mirror with her fan. In a low, dark closet, up a steep stair, in a narrow, confined, dark-browed house in the Canongate, one of the belles of 17— made her toilette; and her chamber woman, in her curch and her tartan screen, was old nurse and sole domestic of the high-headed, strong-minded, stately widow of a wild north country laird, whose son now ruled alone in the rugged family mansion among the

grand, misty mountains of Lochaber. Nelly Carnegie was no beauty; not fair as a red-and-white rose, like Lady Eglinton, or any one of her six daughters; not dainty, like poor imprisoned Lady Lovat; she was more like desperate Lady Primrose, flying shrieking from her mad husband's sword and pistols, or fierce Lady Grange, swearing her bootless revenge on the wily, treacherous, scared Lord of Session; she was wild, witty Nelly Carnegie, whom no precise, stern mother could tame, no hard life at her embroidery or her spinnet—long hours, plain fare, scanty ease, comfort, or luxury—could subdue. Gay, gallant Nelly Carnegie, brown as a gipsy, skin, eyes, and hair—the last a rich, ruddy chesnut brown—with nothing to distinguish her figure but its diminutiveness and the nimbleness of the shapely hands and feet; while Lady Carnegie's lace lappets were higher by half a foot than the crown of many a manikin on whom she looked down, and the back that never bent, or leant for a second on rail or cushion, was straight as an arrow, as well as long. But Nelly, in her absurd, magnificent brocade, and her hoop, that made her small figure like a little russet cask, with her busk and her breast-knot and top-knot, was admired, as odd people will choose what is irregular, strange, and racy, in preference to what is harmonious, orderly, and insipid.

Nelly had a cavalier to walk by her sedan, and her link-boy, as her mother and she traversed the rough streets, and to hand her out at the old Assembly door, although she flung away his hand, and followed her mother alone within the dignified precincts, leaving a gloom and a storm on a lowering brow, un-

shaded by the cocked hat, then carried under the wearer's arm.

The old Assembly Rooms where potent Jacky Murray presided, where urbane Duncan Forbes won hearts, where a gentle laird wooed in sweet numbers —and in vain, the Annie Laurie whose

> ———brow is like the snaw drift,
> Her throat is like the swan's;

much has gone in company with its wigs and ruffles, its patches and snuff; the grace may remain, and the refinement be thorough where it was superficial, but the courtliness of conscious superiority, the picturesque contrarieties and broken natural land that lay below the heaths and craters, exist but as the black gloom and red glare of the past.

There the grave responsible Lord of Session, sober in mien as Scotchmen are wont to be, at midnight roaring over his claret in the mad orgies of the Hell-fire Club; here the pawky, penetrating lawyer, shrewd both from calling and character, playing the reckless game of a correspondence with the stage Court of St. Germains; yonder mettle beauty sailing along on her high-heeled shoes to finish the night's triumph at an oyster supper in a den behind the Luckenbooths. Again an imperial dowager, who still spun her own linen and struck her serving-man with her ivory cane. Truly the old Edinburgh Assembly Rooms had their secrets, and contained more exciting elements under their formal French polish than the repose that among moderns

> Stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

The stated balls at the Assembly Rooms were eras

in Nelly Carnegie's life, yet she met always the same company; every face and name she knew, and what was worse, danced nightly with the same partner. The select society was constituted at the commencement of the season, and when once the individual fan was drawn from the cocked-hat of fate, there was no respite, no room for change. Young Home of Staneholme had knowledge of the filigree circle through which Nelly was wont to insert her restless fingers, and Lady Carnegie furthered his advances; so although Nelly hated him as she did the gloomy Nor-loch, she received his escort to and from the Assembly Rooms, and walked with him her single minuette, as inevitably as she lilted Allan Ramsay's songs, or scalded her mouth with her morning's porridge.

Nelly's suitor was not ill to look upon as far as flesh and blood went; he was a well-made, robust fellow, whose laced coat and deep vest showed the comely, vigorous proportions of youth; the face was manly, too, in spite of its beardless one-and-twenty, but the broad eyebrows sunk, either in study or sullenness, and the jaw was hard and fixed.

Yet to see how Nelly strained her bonds, how she gecked and flouted and looked above him, and curtsied past him, and dropped his hand as if it were live coal, while the heavy brow grew darker, until it showed like a thunderstorm over the burning red of the passion-flushed cheek.

'Take tent, Nelly,' whispered a sedate companion, sensible, cautious, and canny, whose flaxen hair over its roll had the dead greyness of age, though the face below was round and dimpled;

'young Staneholme drew his sword last night on the President's son because he speered if he had skill to tame a gosshawk.'

'Tak tent yerself, Janet Erskine,' Nelly responded wrathfully; 'think twice, or you wed auld Auchtershiel.'

Janet shrank, and her light blue eye blinked uneasily, but no additional colour came into her cheek, nor did her voice shake, though it fell. 'It must be, Nelly; I darena deny my father, and mony mair drink, forby Auchtershiel; and if he cursed his last wife out and in, and drove her son across the sea, they were thrawn and cankered, and he was their head. I'll speak him fair, and his green haughs are a braw jointure. But, Nelly, do ye believe that the auld Laird, the auld ane before Auchtershiel himself, he that shot the Covenanter as he hung by the saugh over the Spinkie-water, and blasphemed when he prayed, walks at night on the burn bank?'

'I dinna ken; if I did not fear a living sorry, I would dare a dead ane,' Nelly protested, with a shade of scorn in her levity; 'and ye can bide in the house on the soft summer nights: the Lady of Auchtershiel need not daunder by the burn side; she can be counten her house purse in the still-room; but if I were she, I would rather beg my bread.'

'Whisht, for shame, Nelly Carnegie,' was returned with a shrillness in the measured tones, 'you would not; and ye'll learn yer own task, and say yes to sour, dour Staneholme.'

'I never will; I'll let myself be starved to death, I'll throttle myself with my own hands first,' cried Nelly Carnegie, fire flashing in her large eyes and

on her dark cheeks; and looking up in her defiance she met the glow for glow of Staneholme's stare. Timeserving Janet Erskine moved off in unconcealed trepidation, and Nelly stood her ground alone, stamping her foot upon the boards, and struggling in vain against the cruel influence she could not control, and to which she would not bend.

'He need not gloom and look at me, the hearkener that could not hear good of himself,' Nelly thought, with passionate vehemence; but her sparkling eyes fell slowly, and her proud panting heart quailed with a long throb.

CHAPTER II.

THE next time Nelly saw Adam Home was by the landing in the Canongate, in whose shelter lay the draw-well, wherein the proud, gently-born laird's daughter dipped every afternoon the Dutch porcelain jug which carried the fresh spring-water wherewith to infuse her mother's cherished, tiny cup of tea. Young Home was passing, and he stepped aside, and offered to take the little vessel from her hand, and stoop and fill it, with a silent salutation and glance that, retaining its wonted downward aim, yet suddenly lightened as if it loved to rest upon the little girlish figure, in its homely tucked-up gown, with black mittens on the round arms, and a velvet band about the swelling throat, and a crimson hood drawn over the chesnut hair, that turned back in a crisp wave from the bold, frank, innocent face—but she waved him off, and

balancing her foot upon the edge-stone, saw herself reflected in the steel-like water. Then he begged with rare softness in a voice that was rough and gruff, unless it deepened with strong feeling—

'Will you suffer me, Nelly Carnegie? I would give my hand to pluck but a flower to serve you.'

Had he tried that tone first, before she was more than chilled by his sombre and imperious gravity, before her mother supported him unrelentingly, before the girl was galled and exasperated by persecution, he might have attracted, fascinated, conquered—as it was, she jeered at him.

'Serve her! he could do her no better service than "mount and go." A posy! it would be the stinging-nettle and dank dock if he gathered it.'

The revenge he took was rude enough, but it was not unheard of in those days; he caught her by the wrist, and under the shadow of the abutting gable he kissed the knitted brow and curling lips, but his grasp was so tight that it gave her pain; and when she wrung herself from him, she shook her little hand with a rage that quivered through every nerve, and had more of hate than romping folly or momentary pique in its passion.

'Nelly Carnegie,' said the lady, as she carefully pulled out the edge of a coil of yellow point-lace—resting on her inlaid foreign work-table, and contrasting with her black mode cloak and white skinny fingers—and looked with her keen, cold, grey eyes on the rebellious daughter standing before her, 'I have word that Staneholme goes south in ten days.'

Nelly could have said 'and welcome,' but she knew the consequences, and forbore.

'He's willing to take you with him, Nelly, and he shows his good blood when he holds that a Carnegie needs no tocher.'

Still Nelly did not answer, though she started so violently that her loosely-crossed hands fell apart; and Nanny Swinton, about her housewifery in the cupboard off the lady's parlour, hearing every word, trembled at the pause.

'Your providing is not to buy,' continued the mistress of the aristocratic household, whose attendance was so scanty, and their wants so ill supplied, that even in necessaries they were sometimes pinched; and who in her own person had looked upon death with the same unblenching front, and had disowned her only son because, in what appeared to others a trifle, he had opposed her law; 'we've but to bid the minister and them that are allied to us in the town, and Nanny will scour the posset dish, and bring out the big Indian bowl, and heap fresh rose-leaves in the sweet-pots. You'll wear my mother's white brocade that she first donned when she became a Leslie, sib to Rothes—no bit housewife of a south country laird, but she was a noble woman, and you're but a heather lintie of a lass to come of a good kind; so God bless you, bairn; ye'll tak the blast of wind and gang.'

As if the benediction had loosened the arrested tongue, Nelly burst out—'Oh, mother, mother! no.'

Not a muscle of Lady Carnegie's marked face relaxed; her occupation went on without a check; she did not deign to show surprise or displeasure, although her voice rose in harsh, ironical emphasis:

'Nelly Carnegie, what's your will?'

'Not that man, mother; not that fearsome man!' pleaded Nelly, with streaming eyes and beseeching tones, her high spirit for the moment broken, her contempt gone, only her aversion and terror urging a hearing—'The lad that's blate and dull till he's braggit by his fellows, then starker than any carle, wild like a north-country cateran, the haill bench o' judges would not stand to conter him.'

'He'll need his stiff temper; I couldna thole a man but a mind of his own, my dear,' ejaculated Lady Carnegie in unexpected, clear, cheery accents, as if her daughter's extremity was diversion to her.

'Oh, spare me, spare me, mother,' Nelly began again.

'Hooly and fairly, Nelly Carnegie,' interrupted the mother, still lightly and mockingly; 'who are you that ye should pick and choose? What better man will speer your price, or think ye that I've groats laid by to buy a puggy, or a puss bawdrons for my maiden lady?'

'I'll work my fingers to the bone, mother; my brother Hugh will not see me want.'

'Eat bite or sup of his victuals, mint a Carnegie's working to me again, Nelly Carnegie, and never see my face more.'

Lady Carnegie had lapsed into grim wrath, that burned a white heat on her wrinkled brow, and was doubly formidable because expressed by no hasty word or gesture.

'Leave my presence, and learn your duty belyve, for before the turn of the moon Staneholme's wife ye sall be.'

Do not think that Nelly Carnegie was thus beaten, although she uttered no further remonstrance where there was stone; although she did not sob and beg and pray, beyond a few minutes, she opposed to the tyrannical mandate that disposed of her so summarily the dead weight of passive resistance. She would give no token of submission; she would make no preparation; she would neither stir hand nor foot in the matter; she remained in ominous inaction. But a hundred years ago the head of a family was paramount, and household discipline wielded without mercy. Lady Carnegie acted like a sovereign: she wasted no time on arguments, threats, or entreaties; she locked her wilful charge into her dark sleeping-closet, and fed her on bread and water until she should consent to her fate. And sometimes Nelly shook the door until its hinges cracked, and sometimes she flung back the bread, the prisoner's fare, doled out to her; and then her mother came with her firm, slow step, and in her hard, haughty manner commanded her to cease, or she would tie her hand and foot, and pour meat and drink down her throat in spite of her, and so cowed her passion, as a strong, restrained, native force will quell an impulse, however wild. And then Nelly lay down on the rough boards, and stretched out her hands as if to push the world from her and die in her despair; but the young life was fresh and strong within her, and she panted for one breath of the breeze that blew round craggy Arthur's Seat, and one drink of St. Anthony's Well, and another look, if it were the last, of the golden sunshine, no beams of which could penetrate her high, little window;

and she would fain again go up the busy street, and watch the crowds of passengers, and listen to the bustling traffic, and greet lightly her friends and acquaintances. Silence and solitude, and the dim light soon eclipsed, and the close air that oppressed her, were things very foreign to her nature; and in the dark night, when her distempered imagination conjured up horrible dreams, Nanny Swinton stole to her door, and bemoaned her bird, her lamb, and whispered hoarsely, 'Do her biddin,' Miss Nelly, she's yer leddy mother; neither man nor God will acquit you; your burden may be lichter than ye trow.' And Nelly was weary, and had sinful, mad thoughts of living to punish her enemies more by the fulfilment of their desire than by the terrors of her early death; and the next time her mother tapped on the panel with her undaunted, unwearied 'Ay or no, Nelly Carnegie; gin the bridal be not this week, I'll bid him tarry another, and gin he weary and ride awa', I'll keep ye steekit here till I'm carried out a corp before ye, and I'll leave ye my curse to be coal and candle, and sops and wine, for the lave o' yer ill days.'

Nelly gasped out a husky, wailing 'Ay,' and her probation was at an end.

CHAPTER III.

THERE was brief space now for Nelly's buying pearlins and pinners and sacques and mantles, and all a young matron's bravery, or for decorating a guest chamber for the ceremony; but Lady Car-

negie was not to be balked for trifles, and Nanny Swinton stitched night and day, with the salt tears from aged eyes, rarely wet, moistening her thread; and Nelly did not swerve from her compact, acting mechanically with the others, as she was told. With a strange pallor on the olive of her cheek, and swollen, burning lids, drooping over sunk violet lines beneath the hot eyeballs, and cold, trembling hands, she bore Staneholme's stated presence in these long, bleak March afternoons. He never addressed her particularly, although he took many a long, sore look. Few and formal were the lover's devoirs expected or permitted then.

The evening was raw and rainy; elderly gentlemen would have needed 'their lass with a lantern,' to escort them from their chambers. The old city guard sputtered their Gaelic, and stamped up and down for warmth; the chairmen drank their last fee to keep out the cold—and in and out the low doorways moved middle-aged women in curch and short gown, and bare feet, who, when snooded maidens, had gazed on the white cockade, and the march of Prince Charlie Stewart and his Highlandmen. Down the narrow way, in the drizzly dusk, ran a slight figure, muffled entirely in one of those screens that shrouded the luckless visitors of the Italian doctor—the bewildered horror-struck gazers into his misty mirror. Fleet of foot was the runner, but her very speed was her defeat; she held her course blindly, for twice she came in contact with intervening obstacles—water-stoups on a threshold, gay ribands fluttering from a booth. Flying from worse than death, with dim projects of begging her way to the

North, to the brother she had parted from a child; ghastly suggestions, like lightning flashes, of seizing a knife from the first butcher's block and ending her misery. She had never heard the fate of the young Roman girl looking into her father's ruthless eyes, but she knew of

> Bonny Bawbie Livingstone
> Playin' at her ba'
> She's met wi' Lord Linlyon
> Who's stown her awa'.

And she could have lifted up her hands to high Heaven and shrieked out the malison—

> Now woe to you, Linlyon,
> An ill death may ye dee!

Hasty steps treading fast upon her track—she distinguished them with morbid acuteness through the speed of her own flight. Mingled steps, a feeble hurrying foot-fall, and an iron tread; she threaded a group of bystanders, and—weak helpless girl, prepared to dive into a mirk close. Not this black opening, Nelly Carnegie, it is doomed to bear for generations a foul stain—the scene of a mystery no Scottish law-court could clear—the Begbie murder. But it was no seafaring man, with Cain's red right hand, that rushed after trembling, fainting Nelly Carnegie: it was the tender arms in which she had lain as an infant, that first clutched her dress; it was a kindly tongue that faltered its faithful, distressed petition—

'Come back, come back, Miss Nelly, afore the Leddy finds out; ye hae nae refuge, an' yer traced already by mair than me.'

Strong hands were upon her, holding her like a fluttering moth, or a wild panting leveret, or a lapwing beating its wings; doing her no violence—as who would brush off the down, or tear the soft fur, or break the ruffled feathers?—but against which she struggled so frantically that poor old Nanny interposed—

'Na, sir; let her be; she'll gae hame wi' me, her ain born serving-woman. And oh, Staneholme, be not hard, it's her last nicht.'

That was Nelly Carnegie's marriage eve.

On the morrow the marriage was celebrated. The bridegroom might pass in his manly prime and his scarlet coat, although a dowf gallant; but who would have thought that Nelly Carnegie in the white brocade which was her grandmother's the day that made her sib to Rothes—Nelly Carnegie who flouted at love and lovers, and sported a free, light, brave heart, would have made so dowie a bride? But the company consisted only of Lady Carnegie's starched cousins, with their husbands and their daughters, who yet hoped to out-rival Nelly with her gloomy Lauderdale Laird.

The hurried ceremony excused the customary festivities; and the family party could keep counsel, and preserve a discreet blindness when the ring dropped from the bride's fingers, and the wine stood untasted before her, while Lady Carnegie did the honours as if lonely age and narrow circumstances did not exist.

CHAPTER IV.

THE March sun shone clear and cold on grey Staneholme, standing on the verge of a wide moor, with the troubled German Ocean for a background, and the piping east wind rattling each casement. There was haste and hurry in Staneholme, from the Laird's mother down through her buxom merry daughters, to the bare-headed servant-lasses, and the substitutes for groom and lacquey, in coarse home-spun, and honest broad blue bonnets. There was bustle in the little dining-room with its high windows which the sea-foam sometimes dimmed—with its spindle-legged chairs and smoked pictures; blythe work in the cheerful hall, in whose broad chimney great sea-coal fires blazed—at whose humming wheels the young Mays of Staneholme, as well as its dependents, still took their morning turn; willing toil in the sleeping-rooms, with their black cabinets and heavy worsted curtains; a thronged *mêlée* in the court formed by the outhouses, over whose walls the small-leaved ivy of the coast clustered untreasured. Staneholme's favourite horse was rubbing down; Staneholme's dogs were airing in couples; even the tenantry of the never-failing pigeon-house at the corner of the old garden were in turmoil, for half a score of their number had been transferred to the kitchen this morning to fill the goodly pasties which were to anticipate the blackberry tarts and sweet puddings, freezing in rich cream. But the sun had sunk behind the moor where the broom was only budding, and the last sea-mew had

flown to its scaur, and the smouldering whins had leaped up into the first yellow flame of the bonfires that were to light the darkness and commemorate the day far and near, and the more shifting, fantastic, brilliant banners of the aurora borealis shot across the frosty sky, as when Derwentwater laid his head on the block—before the first faint shout announced that Staneholme and his lady had come home. With his wife behind him on his bay, with pistols at his saddle-bow, and 'Jock' on 'the long-tailed yad' at his back, with tenant retainers and veteran domestics pressing round—and ringing shouts and homely huzzas and good wishes filling the air, heavy with the smoke of good cheer—Staneholme rode in, and lifting down an unresisting burden, took in his a damp, passive hand, and throwing over his shoulder brief, broken thanks, hurried after the flitting lights, up the flight of stairs, through the rambling, crooked passages, into the hall.

Staneholme was always a man of few words. Staneholme was taken up, as should be, with the little lady, whose habit trailed behind her, and who never raised her modest eyes. 'Well a day, the Laird's bargain was of sma' book,' but 'Hurrah' for the fat brose and lumps of corned beef, and the ale and the whisky, with which they were now to be regaled.

In the hall stood Joan and Madge and Mysie, panting to see their grand Edinburgh sister, only hindered from running down into the yard by the deposed mistress of Staneholme, whose hair was as white as snow, who wore no mode mantle nor furbelows nor laces, like proud Lady Carnegie, but a

warm plaiden gown and a close mob cap, with huge keys and huswife balancing each other at each pocket-hole, and whose cracked voice was very sweet as she reiterated 'Bide till he bring her here, my bairns,' and her kindly smile motherly to the whole world. But think you poor vanquished Nelly Carnegie's trampled-upon heart leapt up to meet these Homes—that her eyes glanced cordially at Joan and Madge and Mysie—that her cheek was bent gratefully to receive old Lady Staneholme's caress? No, no;

> When she reached Linlyon yett,
> And lichted on the green,
> And ilka ane spak Erse to her,
> Sae fast the tears ran down,

Nelly was too wretched to cry, but she stood there like a marble statue, with no more feeling, or show of feeling. Was this colourless, motionless young girl, in her dusty, disarranged habit, the feather of her hat ruffled by the wind, the gay Edinburgh beauty who had won Staneholme? What glamour of perverse fashion had she cast into his eyes!

'Wae's me, would dule never end in this weary warld? Adam lad, Adam, what doom have you dragged down on yoursel'?'

While the thoughtless, self-absorbed girls drew back in disappointment, Lady Staneholme met her son's proud eyes, and stepping past him, let her hand press lightly for a second on his shoulder as she took in hers Nelly's lifeless fingers, and said simply, 'You are cold and weary, my dear, and supper is served, and we'll no bide making compliments, but you're welcome hame to your ain gude-

man's house and folk; and so I'll lead you to your chamber in Staneholme, and then to the table-head, your future place.' And on the way she explained first with noble humility that she did not wait for a rejoinder, because she had been deaf ever since Staneholme rode post haste from Edinburgh from the last sitting of the Parliament; and that since she was growing old, although it was pleasant to serve the bairns, yet she would be glad to relinquish her cares, and retire to the chimney corner to her wheel and her book; and she blessed the Lord she had lived to see the young mistress of Staneholme who would guide the household when she was at her rest. Nelly heard not, did not care to recognise that the Lady of Staneholme—looks, words, and actions—was beautiful with the rare beauty of a meek, quiet, loving spirit which in those troublous days had budded and bloomed and been mellowed by time and trial; and that had she, Nelly Carnegie, chosen, she whose own mother's heart had never melted towards her, might have nestled in that bosom as in an ark of peace.

When Lady Staneholme conducted Nelly down the wide staircase into the chill dining-room, to the chair opposite the claret-jug of the master of the house, Nelly drew back with sullen determination.

'Na, but, my bairn, I'm blithe for you to fill my place; Staneholme's mither may well make room for Staneholme's wife,' urged the lady, gently.

But Nelly remained childishly rooted in her refusal to preside at his board, unless compelled; and her brow, knit at the remembrance of her fall, was set to meet the further encounter. Joan and

Madge and Mysie, with their blooming cheeks, and their kissing-strings new for the occasion, stared as if their strange sister was but half endowed with mother-wit; and Lady Staneholme hesitated until Adam Home's short, emphatic 'As she pleases, mother,' while the flush flew to his forehead, and his firm lip shook, decided the question.

This was Adam Home's resolution, never to control the wife he had forced into his arms, beyond the cold, daily intercourse which men will interchange with a deadly foe, as well as with a trusty frere, never to approach her side, not once to attempt to assuage her malice or to court her frozen lips into a smile. This was his purpose, and he abode by it: he farmed his land, he hunted, and speared salmon, was rocked in his fishing-boat as far as St. Abbs, read political pamphlets, and sat late over his wine, and sometimes abetted the bold smuggling at his door, much like his contemporaries; but, while no pursuit which he followed with fitful excess seemed to satisfy him as it did others, he never sought to supplement it with courting his alien wife.

Lady Staneholme would fain have made her town-bred daughter-in-law enamoured with the duties of country life, and cheered the strange joylessness of her honeymoon; but failing in the attempt, with a covert sigh, half of pain, half of pleasure, she resumed the old oversight of larder and dairy, which was then the delight of many an unsophisticated laird's helpmate, and which, to the contented Lady of Staneholme, had quite made up for the partial deprivation of social intercourse to which her infirmity had subjected her. Joan, Madge, and Mysie,

wearied of haughty Nelly after they had grown accustomed to the grand attire she ever wore, and denied that they had ever been dazzled with it, and ceased to believe that she had danced minuets in the Assembly Rooms before Miss Jacky Murray. They had their own company and their own stories into which they had no temptation to drag an interloper.

Nelly, in her desolation standing apart in the centre of the wholesome, happy union of the family circle, grew to have her peculiar habits and occupations, her self-contained life into which none of the others could penetrate.

CHAPTER V.

THE sea-pink and the rock saxifrage were making the rugged rocks gay, the blue-bell was nodding on the moor, and Nelly had not died, as she had foolishly fancied she should; she had learned to wander out along the shore or over the trackless moor for hours and hours, and return footsore and exhausted; she who had been accustomed only to the Canongate and High-street of Edinburgh, the tall houses with their occasional armorial bearings, the convenient huckster shops—their irregular line intersected by the strait closes, the traffic and gossip; or to the forsaken royal palace, the cowslips of the King's park, which Jeannie Deans might have pulled, the guardian lion of Arthur's Seat on a sunny May morning, with the glittering Forth and distant Leith and its little forest of masts at its feet;

or farther still, green Inchkeith, and blue, misty Berwick-Law, could now watch the red sunset burnishing miles on miles of waving heather, and the full moon hanging above the restless tide; listen to the surf in the storm, and the ripple in the calm, to the cry of the gull and the wh-r-r of the moorcock; pull wild thyme, and pick up rose-tinted shells and perforated stones; and watch shyly her hardy cottar servants cutting peats and tying up flax, catching snatches of their rude Border lore of raid and foray under doughty Homes, who wore steel cap and breastplate for powdered wig and cambric cravat.

The coast-line at Staneholme was high and bold, but in place of descending sheerly and precipitately to the yellow sands, it sloped in a green bank, broken by gulleys, where the long sea-grass grew in tangled tufts, interspersed with the yellow leaves of the fern, and in whose sheltered recesses Nelly Carnegie so often lingered, that she left them to future generations as 'Lady Staneholme's Walks.'

There she could see the London smacks and foreign luggers beating up to ride at the pier of Leith. There she could sit for hours, half hidden, and protected from the sea blast, mechanically pulling to pieces the dried, blackened sea-weed blown up among the small, prickly blush roses: in her green quilted petticoat and spencer she might have been one of the good people's changelings, only the hue of her cheek was more like that of a brownie of the wold; and, truly, to her remote world there was an impenetrable mystery about the young mistress of Staneholme, in her estrangement and mournfulness; some said that she had favoured another lover, whom

Staneholme had slain in a duel or a night-brawl; some that the old Staneholmes had sold themselves to the Devil, and a curse was on their remotest descendants; was not the young laird *fey* at times, and would not the blithe sisters pass into careworn wives and matrons?

There sat Nelly, looking at the sea, musing dreamily and drearily on Old Edinburgh, or pondering with sluggish curiosity over the Homes, and what, by casual looks and words, she could not help gathering of their history. The Lairds of Staneholme had wild moss-trooper blood in their veins, and they had vindicated it to the last generation by unsettled lives, reckless intermeddling with public affairs, and inveterate feuds with their brother lairds.

Adam Home's was a hot heart, constant in its impetuosity, buried beneath an icy crust which he strove to preserve, but which hissed and crackled when outward motives failed, or when opposition fanned the inner glow. With the elements of a despot but half-tamed, yet like many another tyrant, where unchallenged master of his surroundings, Staneholme wielded his authority with fair result; tenant and servant, hanger-on and sprig of the central tree, bore regard as well as fear for the young laird—all save Staneholme's whilome love and wedded wife.

Nelly did not wish to understand this repressed, ardent nature, although its developments sometimes forced themselves upon her. She had heard Staneholme hound on a refractory tyke till he shouted himself hoarse, and yet turn aside before the badger was unearthed; she had seen him climb the scaurs,

and hang in mid-air dizzily over the black water, to secure the wild-fowl he had shot, and it was but carrion; and once, Joan and Madge, to whom he was wont to be indulgent in a condescending, superior way, trembled before the stamp of his foot and kindling flash of his eye. Some affair abroad had disturbed him and he came into the hall, when his sisters' voices were raised giddily as they played off an idle, ill-thought-of jest on grave, cold Nelly; 'Queans and fools,' he termed them, and bade them 'end their steer' so harshly, that the free, thoughtless girls did not think of pouting or crying, but shrank back in affright. Nelly Carnegie whom he had humbled to the dust was below his anger.

When the autumn sun basked on the grey mansion of Staneholme, an auspicious event gladdened its chambers—Joan was matched with a gay, gallant young cousin from Teviotdale, and from the commencement of the short wooing to the indefatigable dance which the young bride led off herself right willingly, all was celebrated with smiles and blessings, and harvest-home fulness of joy and gratitude. But a dark shadow moved among the merrymakers—a young heart robbed of its rights, like an upbraiding ghost, regarding the simple, loving, trusting pair, comparing their consecrated vows with the mockery of a rite into which it had been driven.

The only change time brought to Nelly, was the progress of an unacknowledged bond between her and good old Lady Staneholme. The obstacle to any interchange of ideas and positive confidence between them, was the inducement to the tacit companionship adopted by the sick, wayward heart, with its

malady of wrong and grief. Influenced by an instinctive, inexplicable attraction, Nelly's uncertain footsteps followed Lady Staneholme, and kept pace with her soft tread, when she overlooked her spinners and knitters, and gave out her linen and spices, turned over her herbs, and visited her sick and aged. There they were seen—the smiling, deaf old lady, fair in her wrinkles, and her mute, dark, sad daughter whom in patient ignorance she folded in her mantle of universal charity.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER a pale February sun Nelly was out on the sea-braes, where the sprays of the briar-roses were swept in circles, and streaming far and wide. Nelly lingered in the hollow, and strayed to the utmost limit of her path; returning, her eye fell on the folds of an object fluttering among the tedded grass. It was Staneholme's plaid. This was the first time he had intruded upon her solitary refuge. When Nelly climbed the ascent, and saw the mansion house, with its encumbered court, she could distinguish the sharp sound of a horse's hoof; its rider was already out of sight on the bridle-road. Michael Armstrong, the laird's man, was mounting his own nag; Wat Pringle, the grieve, and other farm folk, stood looking after the vanished traveller; Liddel, the Tweedside retriever, paced discontentedly up and down; and old Lady Staneholme met her on the threshold, and as on the night of her arrival at Staneholme, led her up the staircase and into her sleeping chamber. Nelly marked, with dim dread,

the tear-stains on the pallid cheeks of placid age, and the trembling of the feeble hand that guided her. She had nothing to fear, but what was the news for which there was such solemn preparation?

'My puir bairn,' Lady Staneholme began brokenly, 'I've had an interview with my son, and I've learnt, late, some passages in the past; and I wonder not, but I maun lament, for I am a widow mother, Nelly, and my only son Adam, who did you wrong and showed you no pity, has got his orders to serve with the soldiers in the Low Countries. He has not stayed to think; he has left without one farewell: he is off and away, to wash out the sins of him and his in his young blood; and I will never see his face more: but you are a free woman; and he bids you, as the last duty he will receive at your hand, read his words.'

Nelly's hand closed tightly over its enclosure. 'Who says I told he did me wrang?' she said, proudly, her dilated eyes lifted up to the deprecating ones that did not avoid her gaze.

'Na, na, ye never stoopit to blame him. Weary fa' him! Nelly Carnegie,' ejaculated honest Lady Staneholme, 'although he is my ain, that made you his, sair, sair against your woman's will; and so binged up blacker guilt at his doorstane, as if the lightest heritage o' sin were na' hard to step ower. But, God forgive me! It's auld Staneholme risen up to enter afresh upon his straits, and may He send him pardon and peace in his ain time.'

'Nelly' (Staneholme's letter said), 'for my Nelly you'll never be, though the law has given me body and estate, what garred me love you like life or death?

I've seen bonnier, and you're not good like my mother, or you would have forgiven me long syne. Why did you laugh, and mock, and scorn me, when I first made up to you among your fine Edinburgh folks? Had you turned your shoulder upon me with still stedfastness, I might have been driven to the wall—I would have believed you. When you said that you would lie in the grave sooner than in my arms, you roused the evil temper within me; and though I had mounted the Grass-market, I swore I would make you my wife. What call or title had you, a young lass, to thwart your lady mother and the Laird of Staneholme? And when I had gone thus far—oh! Nelly, pity me—there was no room to repent or turn back; I dared not leave you to dree your mother's wrath, alane: less risk in your wild heart beating itself to death against the other, that would have gladly shed its last drop for its captive's sake. But Heaven punished me. I found, Nelly, that the hand that had dealt the blow could not heal it. How could I approach you with soft words, that had good right to shed tears of blood for my deeds? So, as I cannot put my hand in my breast and die like my father, I'll quit my moors and haughs and my country; I'll cross the sea and bear the musquetoon, and never return; in part to atone, for you sall have the choice to rule with my mother in the routh and goodwill of Staneholme, and among the heather braes, or take the fee for the dowager lands of Eweford, and dwell in state in the centre of the stone, and lime, and reck, and lords and ladies of Edinburgh; in part because I can hold out no longer, nor bide another day in Tantalus,

which is the book name for an ill place of fruitless longing and blighted hope. I'll no be near you in your danger, because when other wives cry for the strong, grieved faces of their gudemen, you will ban the day your een first fell upon me. Nelly Carnegie, why did my love bring no return; no ae sweet kiss; never yet a kind blink of your brown een, that looked at me ance in gay defiance, and now heavily and darkly, till they close on this world?'

Something more Staneholme raved of this undeserved, unwon love, whose possession had become an exaggerated good which he had continued to crave without word or sign, with a boy's frenzy and a man's stanchness. Nelly's power of will was over: she sat with the paper in her hand as if she had ceased to comprehend its contents—as if its release from bondage came too late.

'Dinna ye ken, Nelly woman, his presence will vex you no longer; you're at liberty to go your own gate, and be as you have been—that was his propine,' whispered Lady Staneholme, in sorrowful perplexity, but without rousing Nelly from her stupor; and thus they lifted her on her bed, and watched her until her trial took hold of her. No stand did Nelly make against pain and anguish; she was sinking fast into that dreamless sleep where the weary are at rest, when Lady Staneholme stood by her bed and laid an heir by her side, bidding her rejoice in tones that fell off into a faint quavering sob of tenderness and woe; but Nelly's crushed, stunned heart had still some hidden spring among its withered verdure, and her Benoni called her back from the land of forgetfulness.

CHAPTER VII.

NELLY recovered, at first slowly but cheeringly, latterly with a doubt and apprehension creeping over her brightening prospect—until, all too certainly and hopelessly, her noon, that had been disturbed with thunder-claps and dashing rain, was shrouded in grey twilight.

Nelly would live, but, attacked by a relentless malady, her limbs would never more obey her active spirit; the little feet that had slid in courtly measure, and twinkled in blithe strathspeys, and wandered restlessly over moor and brae, were stretched out in leaden helplessness. When she was young, she 'had girded herself and gone whither she would;' but now, ere she was old, while there was not one silver thread in those chesnut locks, 'another would gird her and carry her whither she would not.' And oh! to think how the young mother's heart was ready to bud and bloom anew, but doomed, until the angel of death freed it from its tabernacle of clay, to drag out a protracted existence, linked to the corpse-like frame of three-score and ten.

Nelly never spoke of her affliction—never parted from her baby. Travelling with difficulty, she removed to Edinburgh, to the aspiring tenement in the busy Canongate, which she had quitted in her distraction. Lady Carnegie, in her rustling silk and with her clicking ivory shuttle, received her into her little household, but not caring to conceal that she did so on account of the aliment Staneholme had

secured to his forsaken wife and heir, and not enduring the occasional sight of her daughter's infirmities without beshrewing them as a reflection on her own dignity, sneering and scoffing at them, until Nanny Swinton began to fear that the judgment of God might strike her lady—a venerable grandame without one weakness of bodily decay, or human affection.

And did Nelly fret and moan over the invalid condition for which there was neither palliation nor remedy? Nay, a blessing upon her at last, she began to witness a good testimony to the original mettle and bravery of her nature. She accepted the tangible evil direct from God's hand, sighingly, submissively, with a noble meekness of resignation, to that which she recognised as Heaven's decree. She rose above her hapless lot, and the wreck that man's injuries and injustice had wrought upon her—the buoyant, tenacious nature—the old Nelly Carnegie, though subdued and chastened, in a degree restored.

'Nanny! Nanny Swinton!' called Nelly from her couch, as she managed to hold up, almost exultingly, the big crowing baby, in its quaintest of mantles and caps, 'Staneholme's son's a braw bairn, well worthy Lady Carnegie's coral and bells.'

''Deed is he,' Nanny assented. 'He'll grow up a stately man like his grandsire;' and recurring naturally to forbidden memories, 'he'll be the marrow of Master Hugh. Ye dinna mind Master Hugh, Lady Staneholme—the picture o' auld Lady Carnegie. That I suld call her auld!'

Nelly's brow contracted with something of its old

indignation—soon up, soon down. 'There's never a look of the Carnegies in my son; he has his father's brow and lip and hair, and you're but a gowk, Nanny Swinton!' and Nelly lay back and closed her eyes, after a season opening them, to tell Nanny Swinton that 'she had been dreaming of a strange, foreign city, full of pictures and carved woodwork, and of a high road traversing a rich plain shaded by apple and chesnut trees, and of something winding and glittering through the branches,' leaving Nanny, who could not stand the sight of two magpies, or of a cuckoo of a morning before she had broken her fast, sorely troubled to account for the vision.

The gloaming of a night in June was on the Canongate and the silent palace of the gallant, gentle King Jamies; Lady Carnegie was gracing some rout or drum; Nanny Swinton was shut in her kitchen, burnishing her superannuated treasures, and crooning to herself as she worked; Nelly, in her solitary, shadowy room, lay plaiting and pinching the cambric and muslin gear whose manufacture was her daily occupation, with her child's clumsy cradle drawn within reach of her hand, when, through the dim light, she distinguished a man's figure at the door. Nelly knew full well those lineaments, with their mingled fire and gloom, to the soldier's feathered beaver in his hand. They did not exasperate her as they had once done; they appalled her with great shuddering; and sinking back, Nelly gasped—

'Are you dead and gone, Staneholme? Do you walk to seek my love that ye prigget for, that canna gladden you now? Gae back to the bottom of the

sea, or the bloody battle-field, and in the Lord's name rest there.'

The figure stepped nearer; and Nelly, even in her blinding terror, distinguished that it was no shadowy apparition, but mortal like herself. The curdling blood rushed back to Nelly's face, flooding the colourless cheek, and firing her with a new impulse. She snatched her child from its slumber, and clasped it to her breast with her thin, transparent hands.

'Have you come back to claim your son, Adam Home? But you'll have to tear him from me with your man's strength, for he's mine as well as yours; and he's my last, my only jewel.'

And Nelly sat bolt upright, with her rosy burden contrasting with her young, faded face, and her large eyes beginning to flame like those of a wild beast about to be robbed of its young.

'Oh no, Nelly, no,' groaned Staneholme, covering his face; 'I heard of your distress, and I came but to speer of your welfare.' And he made a motion to withdraw.

But Nelly's heart smote her, for the wrong her rash words had done him—a wayworn, conscience-smitten man—and she recalled him relentingly.

'Ye may have meant well. I bear you no ill-will; I am stricken myself. Take a look at your laddie, Adam Home, before ye gang.'

He advanced when she bade him, and received the child from her arms; but with such pause and hesitation that it might have seemed he thought more of his hands again meeting poor Nelly Carnegie's, and of her breath fanning his cheek, than of the precious load she magnanimously intrusted to

him. He did look at the infant in his awkward grasp, but it was with a stifled sigh of disappointment.

'He may be a braw bairn, Nelly, I know not; but he has no look of yours.'

'Na, he's a Home every inch of him, my bonny boy,' Nelly assented, eagerly. After a moment she turned her head, and added peevishly, 'I'm a sick woman, and ye need not mind what I say; I'm no fit for company. Good day; but mind, I've forgot and forgiven, and wish my bairn's father well.'

'Nanny Swinton,' called Nelly to her faithful nurse, as she lay awake on her bed, deep in the sober dimness of the summer night, 'think you that Staneholme will be booted and spurred with the sun, riding through the Loudons to Lauderdale?'

'It's like, Lady Staneholme,' answered Nanny, drowsily. 'The keep o' man and beast is heavy in the town, and he'll be fain to look on his ain house, and greet the folk at home after these mony months beyond the seas. Preserve him and ilka kindly Scot from fell Popish notions rife yonder!'

'A miserable comforter are you, Nanny Swinton,' muttered her mistress, as she hushed her child, and pressed her fevered lips to each tiny feature.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUT Staneholme came again in broad day, the next day—the next—and the next, with half excuses and vague talk of business, and Lady Carnegie did not interdict his visits, or his weakness and inconsistency, for they were seemly in the eyes of the world—which she honoured after herself, although she washed her hands of further concerns of these fools.

And Nelly talked to him with a grave friendliness, like one restored from madness or risen from another world. 'Staneholme, you've never kissed the wean, and it's an ill omen,' she said, suddenly, watching him intently as he dandled the child, and, as if jealous of any omission regarding it, appearing satisfied when he complied with her fancy.

'The curtain is drawn, and the shadow is on you; but is there a scar on your brow, Staneholme, and where did you get it?'

'A clour from a French pistol;' it was but skin deep—he was off his camp-bed in a few days.

He stooped forward, as he spoke slightingly, and pushed back the hair that half obscured the faint blue seam.

'Whisht!' said Nelly, reprovingly, 'dinna scorn sickness; that bit stroke might have cost Lady Staneholme her son and my bairn his father;' and she bent towards him in her turn, and passed her fingers curiously and pityingly over the healed wound, ignorant how it burned and throbbed under her

touch. 'When the bairn is grown, and can rin his lane, Staneholme,' Nelly informed him in her new-found freedom of speech, 'I will send him for a summer to Staneholme; I'll be lonesome without him, but Michael Armstrong will teach him to ride, and he'll stand by Lady Staneholme's knee.' Staneholme expressed no gratitude for the offer, he was fastening the buckle of his beaver. The next time he came he twisted a rose in his hand, and Nelly felt that it must indeed be Beltane: she looked at the flower wistfully, and wondered 'would the breezes be shaking the bear and the briar roses on the sea-braes at Staneholme, or were the grapes of southern vines bonnier than they?' He flung down the flower, and strode to her side.

'Come hame, Nelly,' he prayed passionately; 'byganes may be byganes now. I've deserted the campaign, I've left its honours and its dangers—and I could have liked them well—to free men, and am here to take you hame.'

Nelly was thunderstruck. 'Hame!' she said, at last, slowly, 'where you compelled me to travel, where I gloomed on you day and night, as I vowed; I, who would not be a charge and an oppression to the farthest-off cousin that bears your name. Are you demented?'

'And this is the end,' groaned Staneholme, in bitterness; 'I dreamt that I would win at last. I did not love you for your health and strength, or your youth and beauty. I declare to you, Nelly Carnegie, your face is fairer to me, carved deeper on my heart, lying lily white on your pillow there, than when it was fresh like that rose; and when others

deserted you and left you forlorn, I thought I might try again, and who kent but the ill would be blotted out for the very sake of the strong love that wrought it.'

A dimness came across Nelly's eyes, and a faintness over her choking heart; but she pressed her hands upon her breast, and strove against it for the sake of her womanhood.

'And I dreamed,' she answered slowly and tremulously, 'that it but to be true, true love, however it had sinned, that neither slight nor hate, nor absence nor fell decay could uproot; and that could tempt me to break my plighted word, and lay my infirmity on the man that bargained for me like gear, and that I swore—Heaven absolve me!—I would gar rue his success till his deein' day. Adam Home, what are you seekin' at my hands?'

'Nae mair than you'll grant, Nelly Carnegie, pardon and peace, and my young gudewife, the desire o' my eyes. I'll be feet to you, Nelly, as long's I'm to the fore.'

'Big tramping feet, Staneholme,' said Nelly, trying to jest, and pushing him back; 'dinna promise ower fair. Na, Adam Home, you'll waukin the bairn!'

So Staneholme bought the grand new family coach of which the Homes had talked for the last generation; and Lady Carnegie curtsied her supercilious adieus, and hoped her son and daughter would be better keepers at home for the future. And Nanny Swinton wore her new gown and cockernonie, and blessed her bairn and her bairn's bairn, through tears that were now no more than a sunny shower, the silver mist of the past storm.

There was brooding heat on the moors and a glory on the sea when Staneholme rode by his lady's coach, within sight of home.

'There will be no great gathering to-night, Staneholme; no shots or cheers; no lunt in the blue sky; only doubt and amaze about an old man and wife: but there will be two happy hearts that were heavy as stane before. Well-a-day! to think I should be fain to return this way!'

Staneholme laughed, and retorted something perhaps neither quite modest nor wise; but the ready tongue that had learnt so speedily to pour itself out to his greedy ears did not now scold and contradict him, but sighed—

'Ah, Adam Home, you do not have the best of it; it is sweet to be beat; I didna ken—I never guessed that.'

Gladly astounded were the retainers of Staneholme at their young laird's unannounced return, safe and sound, from the wars; but greater and more agreeable was their friendly surprise to find that his sick wife, who came back with him unstrengthened in body, reappeared healed and hearty in spirit. Well might good old Lady Staneholme rejoice, and hush her bold grandson, for the change was not evanescent or its effects uncertain. As Staneholme drove out his ailing wife, or constructed a seat for her on the fresh moor, or looked at her stitching his frilled shirts as intently as the child's falling collars, and talked to her of his duties and his sports, his wildness was controlled and dignified by the presence of a trust that, in proportion as he valued it above silver and gold, lands and life, he was forced to hold loosely

—that kept all others in mind, and at once humbled and ennobled him—and when he sat, how much the head and protector of his deaf old mother, and his little frolicksome, fearless child, and his Nelly Carnegie, whose spirit had come again, but whose body remained but a sear relic of her blooming youth, his fitful melancholy melted into the sober tenderness of a penitent, believing man, who dares not complain, who must praise God, and be thankful so long as life's greatest boons are spared to him.

LADY STRATHMORE'S DAUGHTER.

Still it is true, and over true,
That I delight to close
This book of life, self-wise and new,
And let my thoughts repose
On all that humble happiness
The world has since foregone—
The daylight of contentedness
That on those faces shone!

Man now his virtue's diadem
Puts on, and proudly wears,
Great thoughts, great feelings, came to them
Like instincts, unawares;
Blending their soul's sublimest needs
With wants of every day,
They went about their gravest deeds
As noble boys at play.

R. Monckton Milnes.

CHAPTER I.

JANET AT ROUEN.

A SETTING sun of 17— streamed on the oaks and apple-trees of Normandy; on the Seine brimming beneath its poplars; on the orchards, where women and children would

gather the russet pippins when their harvest-work was fulfilled; on the chateaux whence France has drawn her admirals; and on the ancient towns where Norman William held his truncheon in his strong right hand, and where the heroic crusader Richard was at last at rest. The golden light burnished the roofs, painted fronts, grotesque signs, and gorgeous heads set in the corbels. It flamed upon the tower and cathedral of St. Ouen. Arches, shafts, and famed rose windows—the nameless apprentice's invention, which struck with mortal envy the architect Bonneval—and stained glass whose glorious tints of purple, crimson, blue, and orange fell, like human fame, forgetting the victim, on the murderer's grave.

Into a quaint old street, into a sober old house, with small peaked windows and many a little bare cell, the beams had penetrated; even as into the hearts of a few isolated old women, narrowed and frozen, or driven into extravagance by routine and superstition, there could dart growth and fruition to deeds of kindness and love. That little mansion, dignified and yet humble, was defended, as by a flaming sword, by a grille; and behind that grille was the shrine of St. Anna. There tapers burnt and sisters chanted; and every spring or summer morning, such as this, young Norman girls laid fresh flowers at her feet who lived seventeen hundred years before, an obscure Jewish matron, full of homely cares and homely joys; and whose virgin daughter had her own heart 'pierced' with the sword that slew the Son of God and man.

In the priory parlour, with its walnut-tree cup-

boards and its matting, sat the prioress. A daughter of a poor, long-descended house, the convent had been as surely her portion from her cradle as the army and the German and Austrian wars had been her brother's inheritance. For its stillness and its chillness, its wrapt mystic trances, the child sported, the girl bloomed, without a thought of rebellion. She was a woman of sixty now. She had been a maiden when Luxemburg rose up from effeminacy and disease to battle with the English; when Eugene was the curse of his country; when gay courtly women of the world sported their lace fichus, and named them Steinkirks; when Racine and Corneille wrote, and Molière lived. She was a woman when harsh, besotted, earnest James and bland Mary of Modena last trode the terrace of St. Germain; she was long past her prime when Prince Charlie returned from his knightly adventure, a fugitive and an outcast. There was many a wrinkle beneath her hood, and her gait was stiff and feeble; yet she did not repose in luxurious indulgence like Abbot Boniface, or in the philosophy of that easy Archduchess of Austria to whose cloistered face small-pox was so slight an evil. Corrupt nunneries had been purified by the example of the Pascals—brother and sister, Fénélon, and Mère Angélique of the Port Royal; they were now the asylum of the peevish, the weary, or the dreamily devout. Her features, always plain, were stamped with timidity and anxiety—the fear of a simple nature prone to impulse, and guarded by awful shadows, to meet which long acquaintance never rendered her indifferent, nor twenty years of rule courageous.

A good, pious soul was the Mother of St. Anna's of Rouen, but she was a true Roman Catholic. Her confessor was austere and ardent; she held herself bound to be austere also; but was for ever breaking out into little infringements, petty overlooks, nervous omissions, cowardly concessions, treacherous compliances; until half of her time was spent in repentance and penance—and farther, being tormented by her satellites, a more vacillating and scared old woman did not exist.

Even now, as Mère Ursule rang her little bell, and summoned by means of a lay sister one of the *pensionnaires*, she employed the few minutes' interval between the message and its fulfilment to repeat a penitentiary psalm for the ten minutes' sleep stolen from midnight prayers; and she felt pricked in her conscience for the anxiety caused her by a letter from the outer world lying in darkness, and stored up a *credo* to be said at her next leisure, to quell and conquer her fleshly heart. Poor Mère Ursule! —the truth might have rendered her pure, but it certainly had not left her free, rather helpless, self-engrossed, and harassed—a poor trembling slave.

Mère Ursule sat in her chair as the prioress, whose responsibilities were the weight and chain which dragged her to the dust, expecting one of her charges—an individual member of the youthful troop who were reared to gifts and graces, to silk embroidery and ritual observances under the banner of St. Anna—and whose direction, with their doles to the poor, was the practical duty of the sisterhood.

The door in the recess opened suddenly, and facing

the blanched and bent prioress stood a pupil who contrasted with her as May with December.

A young girl of seventeen, tall and womanly, but girlish in her carnation colour, and most girlish in expression, fearless, inquiring, pettish, wilful, yet tractable in one. Her figure was as erect and pliable as any sapling ash or beech; her face was not regular, but it contained points that flashed upon one with their excellent charm. There was the mouth, not a cherry mouth, not a simpering lip, not a shrewish, not a false one—sometimes saucy, sometimes sour, but capable of curving into command and melting into tenderness—a proud, kind mouth as ever was seen; there was the eyebrow, the most clear, decided, but delicate pencilling;—little wonder at these tokens, she was the daughter of one, the adjunct to whose title, in centuries to come, was not the infatuated or reckless, but the 'beautiful' Countess of Strathmore.

The girl was dressed, like her companions, in uniform—plainly but artificially fashioned; the blue gown with long straight waist and full skirt, the bodice, the white muslin kerchief crossed at the waist, the high-heeled shoes, the close round-eared cap confining the nut-brown hair. She saluted La Mère respectfully, but with an untroubled eye, and heard her reproof for her abruptness silently but undistressed.

There was the embodiment of a different nature, a warm, energetic, vigorous spirit—like hers who braved shame and contumely, and wedded, nay, wooed, George Forbes, her handsome groom.

'Jeannette,' said the prioress, in her provincial

French, fumbling for her rosary, 'knowest thou, my poor child, that I have heard from thy father?'

The girl started; her forehead flushed; her eyes sparkled and then filled; her lip curved and then drooped.

'Jeannette,' said her guide, uneasily, 'I wish that thou wouldst be more tranquil about what concerns mere worldly relations; and also, although thy father is an unhappy heretic, that thou wouldst learn to express filial interest in his welfare; thou wast more forward with thy questions when thou hadst learnt that the dog from the world without had killed the cat Merluche.'

'Mother,' exclaimed the girl, 'what of my father?'

'Jeannette,' reasoned the poor prioress, 'thy brusqueness savours more of passion than of obedience, but I forgive thee—that is, I ordain thee only fasting for this day from Sœur Thérèse's *pain d'épice*, and from the work of the garlands. My child, thy father greets thee through me, and desires thy return to his own land in one of the vessels that sail from Rouen to the port of Leith.'

Again the girl started still more violently; again her face was agitated; but this time there was keen joy in its emotion—and the joy remained dancing in the grey eyes after the resentment, suspicion, and pain passed away.

'To Scotland, Mother,' she exclaimed, clasping her small hands tightly, 'to Strathmore at last!'

'And what of Scotland, Jeannette?' answered the prioress, wonderingly. 'It is a cold and barren land; it rejects its best sons and daughters; it is an accursed land of heretics.'

The girl fired up. 'My father is a heretic, Mother, and so am I,' she said, proudly.

'Holy Virgin, alas, yes! though bred under the roof of St. Anna,' sighed Mother Ursule. 'But thy blessed mother died in the one faith, my daughter.'

'And Scotland is a noble land of mountains and rivers and woods; Strathmore is a valley—oh, so wide, rich, and fair, watered by the Isla; and Glammis is a princely castle that came by the daughter of a king; and it has a hundred dials, Mère Ursule, borne upon lions' paws. Lady Strathmore's Nannette told me,' continued Janet, with enthusiasm.

'Thou wilt be its Châtelaine, Jeannette, and a grand lady; and thou wilt forget St. Anna, and the Sœurs, and Charlotte, and Amalie, and the others.'

Janet looked wistfully in her face; and then she flung herself on her knees, and clasped her arms round the prioress.

'Oh, no! no! Mother, St. Anna was kind to the poor forlorn girl in the foreign land; and she will never, never cease to remember and to love you all; but France is not my own land, Charlotte and Amalie are not my true sisters. My father has thought of me at last, so forgive me that I go to him.'

Mother Ursule was affected as well as discomposed. 'Hush, hush, Jeannette; thou must learn to be tranquil before thou settest out into the rough world—thou canst not do otherwise yet, my poor lamb—with all its glitter it is full of sin; and thou art not even within the fold and under our Lady's ever watchful care. But I will pray for thee as well as against my own carnal affections, I will pray for

thee;' and clinging to her rosary as to an anchor, Mother Ursule signed a hasty dismissal to her most troublesome *pensionnaire*, and sank back in her walnut-tree *prie-Dieu*.

Soon the sun set, and the vesper bell rang, and the sisters passed to their last daily act of worldly observance—their supper of *potage au lait*—and the early crescent moon alone looked in on the brown little cells of St. Anna and their snowy beds, and the one wakeful, quivering, restless face half hidden in the gloom.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEAN.

THE fair kingdom of Fife lay looming out of the spring mists and waving under the spring gales—Flanders storms the coast folk named them, as they strewed the shore with weed, and not seldom with fragments of wreck; but the kingdom was more peaceful withal than her castles and her country houses, her lords and her lairds. Kellie had a name tainted with Jacobitism; Balcarres had but escaped a similar doom, and was driven in his impoverished exchequer and many children to the shifts of thrift and saving; Balmerino's title had met a bloody termination; that of Lindores had also ceased, save on the lip of courtesy; the stock of Rothes was ever wild; while among the lairds less marked men, racing, carousing, gaming, brawling caused many ancient patrimonial designations to part company, and broad lands won by lance and spur to pass ignobly into meaner hands.

In the mains and granges were also riotous lives and premature deaths; but there and in the substantial burgess families of the towns, and in the cottages of the peasantry, especially when men came of Whig ancestry, existed most of the contentment and prosperity of the country. Under the ridge of the green Lomonds, amongst other sunny nooks, lay a farm-house, termed the Dean. The one-storied grey-roofed dwelling affixed to its farm court, and opening on one side to its own green fields and hedgerows, and to the rugged heathery eminence of the West Lomond, was built at the entrance to a small den or dean—where the eye could wander down the feathery banks, tufted with ash and beech, with many a wild cherry, and many a hazel and thorn, and trace here and there the thread-like silver burn.

The situation was secluded and hidden, though from the neighbouring heights, or from either of the Lomonds, the view was wide and rich enough to explain why the bold bordermen were given to harrying Fife and the Lothians. There lay the royal hunting ground of Falkland, with grey Falkland itself, and its small satellite, the ancient Court Coventry, the Fruchie: yonder wound the Eden past Balfour of Burley's ruined castle, Pitlour, Kinloch, Melville, and Rankeillour, with the hamlets of Strathmiglo and Colessie, and the weaver town of Auchtermuchty; away on that table land waved the woods of Leslie House and Balbirnie, and from this eminence stretched the hill of Benarty, at whose feet slept storied Loch Leven and Kinross, with the stately square of Kinross House, built by Bruce of Kinross, as a shelter for his unfortunate master James.

The Dean looked on none of these places. It was its own world—a home-like, hearty, plentiful world —which its inmates denominated the town, the farm town of the Dean, sweet when the beeches and ashes were in their tender green; mellow and brilliant, when full summer yellowed the corn and purpled the hills; snug and slumberous when the wintry drift whirled and eddied in its recesses, when the sheep were crowded in the yard, or if incautiously left exposed on the hill-side, dug out with labour and danger.

Most kindly folk were the dwellers in the Dean—Simon Lauder, his wife, son, and daughter—simple, upright people, in the master's case, graced with talent and learning not rare under a Scotch roof of any class. And Simon Lauder was well descended —a branch of the House of Lauder of the Bass, a line of some standing among the Fife gentry—and had been educated by an uncle, an erudite professor in St. Andrew's University, though he found in after life no higher calling than that of an honest yeoman.

In the yard congregated young cattle, pigs, dogs, stray lambs, and poultry. The sides of the irregular square were formed of out-house, shed, barn, cottage of very various proportion, closed at one end by an irregular mass of toppling, tipsy stacks, completed on the other by the gable of the farm-house, with its small heavy windows, one of them belonging to the great kitchen, deliberately surveying every atom of the home farm work. In the front of the house, commanding the little den, was the garden, divided into two narrow strips by high privet hedges, and planted with hardy vegetables, curling greens,

feathery carrots, needle-like onions, with a few gooseberry bushes and apple-trees, and little knots of humble flowers—'the bonny briar bush of our kail-yard,' tufted sweetwilliam, purple thyme. At this spring season the branching apple-trees were covered with rosy buds; the gooseberry and the currant bushes on the low wall were in full blossom; clusters of red and white auricula and waving daffodils made gay the little garden; and the blackbirds in the den, even in this bleak Scotch April, were trilling their melodies.

The farm-house door stood open, as it did from morning till night; and beyond the spence appeared the kitchen, the family apartment, roomy, low-roofed, and dark as far as daylight was concerned; but summer and winter, a great fire roared up the ample chimney, and glowed on the flitches, the coils of worsted, the herbs on the shelves, the glancing dishes and cupboard filled with Dutch porcelain. The chairs and settles were black with age, and clear as a mirror with careful polish; so were the spinning-wheels, humming their endless song; while the tables were delicately white as sand and scouring-cloths could render them. In the warm chimney corner was niched a great chair in a tartan wrapper; and there, enveloped in shawls and a red camlet cloak, her very cap protected by a plaid screen, lay a woman in middle life; wasted and ghastly, save when the fever-spot burned on her cheek; composed and resigned as only a habit of sickness implies. Many a cottage and many a hall held then similar victims to the life-long chills and heats, and racking pains of ague.

Mrs. Lauder had been struck down early, and

never entirely delivered from the disease. She had been a cheery, active woman in her better days; and it was a notable thing to remark how the elastic spirit and the sunny temper had, under grace, triumphed over even this malady, and trampled it under foot. How helpful she still was; how in her great chair, or creeping about the farm-house, she conquered the body, continued the mistress, the guiding spirit, the strength and sweetness of the dwelling, until her family half forgot that she was a stricken woman. The captiousness, the waywardness, the cloud, and the darkness, were for Anne Lauder's saddened brow and shaken spirit.

In the deep embrasure of the gable window, piled up on its bunker, were some old copies of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and a few well-used calf-skin volumes, Hector Boece's *History of Scotland*, and Livy and Virgil mingling their venerable and noble voices, their memories of imperial Rome and the rich plains of Lombardy, not unharmoniously with the rustic sounds of the Dean kitchen. In the other window stood Anne Lauder's wheel, and on the sill was her huswife; but Anne herself was absent. Over the chimney corner, opposite his mother's seat, hung various portions of shining harness, and half-finished traps for vermin, and nets for birds—that was John Lauder's place, occupied only when the daylight was done, and the family gathered round the hearth. In the background one servant lass sat at her wheel, singing in an undertone the ditty of 'Huntingtower;' while the other, having concluded her scrubbing of the stone floor, ranged on the shelves the trenchers and mugs used at dinner.

The clock struck four. Mrs. Lauder looked up pleasantly.

'Make haste, bairns; make haste, Jean: the gudeman and John will be in presently. The sowing keeps them late; the more need that their four hours be ready served. Men-folk should never be trysted with disorder and delay.'

Jean bustled forward, and proceeded to set plates and fry ham and boil eggs; and the gudewife counselled her that 'the gudeman preferred his eggs hard, and Jock gave his vote for the bacon crisp.'

A quick, restless foot crossed the threshold, and Anne Lauder stood in the room. She had a drooping chicken carried carefully in one hand, and in the other she held a few shoots of broom bursting into golden rods. She was a well-grown girl of three-and-twenty, with a good and modest, not a pretty face; the hair was auburn, the complexion pale, the cheek-bones prominent; there was something thoughtful, considerate, self-forgetful in the look, that yet was not contented, but careworn, abstracted, eager. She wore a dress only a little finer than that of the servant girls: a petticoat of dark blended colours, a short gown of buff linen, her hair interwoven and bound with a riband—a becoming dress to Anne, as to other young women.

She brought in a little wicker basket filled with feathers, and, depositing therein the ailing chicken, and covering it lightly, placed it within the fireside circle, saying, 'Poor birdie, poor forsaken, shivering thing.'

'Is it one of Tappie's birds?' inquired Mrs. Lauder; 'she's aye been a poor bird-mother; I

would have thrawn her neck and put her in the pot over and over again, but for her beauty, the feckless thing, and she follows Jock's foot like a dog.'

'What cock or hen, duck or goose, down to the wee silly bantams, will not do that, mother?' observed Anne, listlessly.

'Bairn,' exclaimed Mrs. Lauder, in her faint joking voice, 'you carry these bits of broom as if they were posies—lilies, or gilliflowers.'

Anne's face flushed slightly. 'Mother, they're just little thought of because they're common; set them in flower-pots, and but ane for miles, and they would be wonders. I was up the den listening to the blackbirds that I have heard ilka summer of my life without staying to take in their song any more than the birr of the wheel or the threshing mill. I fancy you will think that nonsense too; but, na, the very gowans are bonny ladies, it's only us that are ill-looking and ill-doing under the sun.' And Anne turned her back; but the next moment her hand was, as if mechanically, smoothing her mother's pillows, and taking Jean's post she concluded the preparations for the sunset meal so quickly and neatly, that it did the eye good to see her.

Mrs. Lauder's sunken eye brightened, but she sighed too; her Anne had been as clever and dutiful and happy a girl as ever honoured a mother's training, or blessed a father's roof: but by Anne, so simple, honest, and unimaginative, had been worked out one of those destinies that convert the milk of human nature to gall.

Anne Lauder, in her usefulness and her sheer goodness, had thought less of love and lovers than

most maidens; perhaps looking up to Simon Lauder with the breadth, wealth, and gentleness of his cultivated powers, though rude herself, she would have been hard to please. But Anne had an admirer, an ardent, desperately-earnest adorer, one of her brother John's comrades, a handsome, hot-headed, wild young man, a yeoman, like the Lauders, but as unlike as possible to Anne. Anne had laughed at his excessive devotion, and paid little heed to his prayers. John Lauder had warned his sister against what he, a grave, slow man, scorned as the mere froth of idle passion. Simon Lauder and his wife were shy of an imprudent match. The lover, treated coolly on all sides, goaded by disappointment and contempt, became more unsteady and reckless in his principles and life, sinking rapidly in his career, until a year before, in a brawl over a shooting match, he 'slew a young man to his hurt,' and flying from justice and flinging behind him a burning farewell of mingled love and hate to Anne Lauder, he disappeared. Some said he flung himself from the nearest craig, and that his body might be found—the bones bleaching among the dank stones, the hemlock, and the nettles of the hollow below. Some that he was pressed and had gone to sea, and would serve out his time before the mast, in a man-of-war, and never dare return to the north of Fife. Others held that he had enlisted under orders for America, and was now fighting, a private soldier in Captain Bruce's regiment, with that portion of the British army engaged in the American wars. Dead or alive, he had disgraced his name, and by vice and crime was an outlawed man, rejected and spurned alike by friend and kinsman.

The catastrophe smote Anne Lauder's gentle heart: many said she did not deserve blame; loving voices urged her to peace, and screened her with indignant zeal from one hair of the head's injury, though poor Jamie Herriot's mother, and his brother and sisters, spoke hard words against her in their sore sorrow; but Anne Lauder could not forget. She saw Jamie Herriot before her in the frank, foolish fondness of his first sueing; she bade the boy begone; and she recalled the strange pang written on the brow, the fixed reproach of the eye, the lowliness of the supplication. She saw him a man with the fire of hell in his face and heart; or an unshrouded corpse abandoned to the raven and the crow—and all innocent as she was of evil thought or deed in the matter, her still heart melted; sympathies undreamed of before were ever yearning for utterance; a thousand mute voices spoke suddenly in her appalled ears; her whole nature was transfigured; she turned against the friends to whom she had been so attached and submissive; in her secret soul she blamed them—her wise, mild father, her manful, laborious brother, her suffering, uncomplaining mother—as the authors of her misery.

The watery sun had gone down, and following on each other's footsteps, Simon Lauder and his son entered their dwelling. They were both tall men, and both, though clad in the coarsest of hodden grey, possessed that nameless personal dignity with which the Hays of Luncarty may have bent to the yoke; but the father vindicated his superior training by an air of higher breeding than that borne by his descendant. A massive, tranquil, sagacious face was

Simon Lauder's when he removed the bonnet, below which his hair was now grizzled and scanty; and there was an ease in his movements and a natural courtesy in his homely address such as might have distinguished any squire or laird in the land.

John Lauder was heavy looking, but there was sense in his firm lip and steadfast eye. Because of the scarcity of labouring men—not yet recovered from the thinning of the late rebellion, drained as the country was by the present war, and by the fact that the times when great bubble schemes burst, were not very prosperous—and also in spite of or because of his father's 'wit,' John Lauder had to undergo an extraordinary amount of toil in order to preserve the family comfort and independence. So unfailing was John, so quiet, that unconsciously the family, his father even, depended upon his discretion and had confidence in his goodness, and threw upon him a burden under which his nature could not develope itself, or expand in hardy, lusty greenness, especially since Anne's misfortune. John Lauder had been an anxious fellow, careless of accomplishment or enjoyment, subdued and broken, if it had not been for the natural unavoidable clumsy force of his character and the depth of his principles.

The Lauders were closely conformed to old Presbyterianism in its earnestness and fear of God; and Anne, before her life was blasted and her heart was wrung, had been an example of humble reverence and loving docility: if her faith failed her in the storm, it was a true faith nevertheless, and its perfume hung about her still,—whispered, perhaps, of the day when what had given way on earth would

be mended and perfected, if not here below, in yon pure heaven above.

'How have you fared to-day, Mysie, my woman?' inquired Simon Lauder, lovingly, as he sat down at the board end.

'Real well, Simon; I had just two drows, and I'm as steady as a rock to-night;' and Mrs. Lauder extended her emaciated, tremulous arm. 'Nay, John, dinna smile, I'm steady for me; I'm ne'er a big, strong man like you. Thank you, Anne, thank you, my dear,—I'm near enough the table.'

'You ken you'll spill your cup, mother, or you'll gar John hold it, and get nothing for himself; but if he likes, it's all ane to me.'

'Mysie, lass,' said Simon Lauder, meditatively, 'I wish we could get word of some great physician to cure your disorder; John and me would spend our substance upon him, and work till we won more. I'm no so stiff yet, and John there, is an ox for strength. There was Master Cornelius Agrippa, lang syne,—and one Cardan; but I doubt he was a great rogue.'

'I'll have to do with no more rogues after taking up with you, Simon Lauder.'

'And there was Harvey, a better man than either: but I know of no great name of this century in medicine, though in other things there have been Mansfield and Stair, Rodney and Clive, James Thomson and Allan Ramsay.'

'No physician could heal a ten years' ague, Simon, lad,' observed Mrs. Lauder, meekly; 'it is well that there's a great Physician for the soul, both in this world and the next.'

Simon Lauder bent his fine head reverently. Scotch philosophers were not yet linked with the sneers and the scepticism of Hume.

The meal went on in silence until John Lauder looked up suddenly, with a beam of pride and pleasure in his blue eye,—'Father, I forgot. What was in my head? Colonel Beresford is to take our colt, and give you your own price.'

Simon Lauder laid down his knife and fork in honest triumph. 'Our colt bought as a charger for his Lordship! reared by ourselves! the foal of my mare Jess! John, lad, we may hold up our heads.'

'The colt,' Mrs. Lauder exclaimed, 'to go so far, and be so promoted!'

'John's colt—that he fed on bits of our bannocks many a day—to smell powder and run to battle! Jean, Lizzy, the colt's to gang to his Lordship, and the Countess will be fancying our calves next!' exclaimed Anne, with animation; but the generous exultation which would formerly have lasted for days in their uneventful life, died out as she spoke; and John knew, as he cast down his eyes in replying to his father's next question, that Anne's lip was again quivering, and her bleeding heart swelling afresh against him in undying contest.

'Where did the Colonel look save here, John?'

'He was over Kinneil, Logiebutts, and Woodmill,' John said, in a low voice. Simon Lauder was pushing back his chair.

'I ken not about the calves, but there's the sheep, John, the sheep; so much clothing needed for the troops: and Colonel Beresford telled me that Hope of Pinkie has found mines of diamonds, black

diamonds, Mysie, seams of burning coal, across the water; and I've been thinking that there may be coal, or lead, or silver and gold themselves far down beneath the green brows of our Lomonds, if the laird would but dig; aye, there's wealth in the world that no miser could count; *Dominus providebit.*' And Simon took up his magazine, and read how the author Junius was electrifying London, and Beckford the Mayor counselling the King.

John Lauder appropriated his appointed seat, and while the young women, clearing the board, began to bake and to spin, he conversed at intervals with his mother, telling the day's news,—what acres he had sown, what peats were to be cut next day, where he had chosen her flax field, how he had met Katie Fleming on her way to the Kinross preachings and bidden her come for her dole, how Roger Arnot was bent upon getting to Edinburgh or to Glasgow to show his model to some machinery man; while Mrs. Lauder, with long pauses, knitted her grey hose and bent to him her ear. Anne span, and looked not at the flaxen thread, but saw what wrecks on the stormy sea! what hissing bullets and flashing swords, and ghastly heaps of wounded men! what savage Indians with scalps and tomahawks!—or what still and terrible object half covered with the long grass, a rag showing here and there among the untrodden vegetation in the cairn where the sun never shone, beneath the overhanging crags of the Lomonds.

In the quiet household, quieter now than it was wont, where the servant lasses exchanged their occasional gossip in an undertone, that they might not

disturb the master at his everlasting book, the sound from the adjoining yard and out-houses, the bark of the watch-dog at a passing step, the stamping of the horses in their stable, the occasional low of a greedy cow who had eaten her allowance of hay and looked for more, the shrill cackle of a hen pushed by a quarrelsome neighbour on her crowded beam or dreading a prowling rat among her youthful brood, the bleat of the lambs to their mothers, the very laugh of the herd-boy as he hoaxed Saunders the full-grown ploughman at his own fireside, and the scolding of Saunders' wild wife—were perceptible and familiar sounds. At last the clock struck eight, the servant girls got out their pitchers with right good will. Anne Lauder rose wearily, John took his cap to preside over the horse suppering, and Simon Lauder and his wife sat alone by their bright hearth.

Again the household gathered together, the big ha' Bible was open before the master, his dependents were decently devout, waiting upon the nightly exercise, and to his prayer he was adding a pathetic cry for all in mental straits which had its application only in the private knowledge and the tender sympathy that pervaded the members of the family group.

CHAPTER III.

THE VOYAGE.

THE Dutch lugger was rolling in the Channel, its clumsy sails were set, its deck was spotless, the captain and sailors, in their shirts and white trousers, were giving and executing orders with all coolness, irrespective of a young girl who sat close

to the bow and gazed across the sounding waters; she had seen the last of the towers of Rouen, and of the cold, pale, spirit-worn face of Mère Ursule; before her lay a new world, and the fearless, eager girlish countenance was all lit up at the prospect: though the rough tread of the sailors, the hard fare, the rocking ship, the roaring waves were very different from the peaceful, orderly cells of St. Anna, the hall where the sisters worked, and the garden where they gathered their beans and salads, and pulled the amaranth for their chaplets when the roses and jessamine, and even the late chrysanthemums, were withered and gone. Sometimes the strangeness and loneliness made the young heart sink; but beyond this passage and this tossed ship were home and father, rank and honour, such as the proud spirit had known like a dim and distant dream, and craved with the fervour of first ambition.

Janet had changed her convent dress, and wore a cloth riding-habit and beaver hat. She spoke to the captain in English; he had addressed her in that language as if she ought to be acquainted with it, and she had known it in a degree, and wished anxiously to renew the long intermitted practice.

The captain did not heed her much; he was a stout, stiff man, occupied with smoking his pipe, and doing his duty, and if he felt any anxiety it was for damage or danger to the valuable cargo of smuggled silks and brandy beneath the walnuts and filberts disposed on the surface.

'Have you made one such voyage before?' she asked him, as the cordage rattled and the planks creaked.

'Ja, ja, a thousand,' he answered briefly, passing on.

The girl drew herself up; she was treated with little ceremony; but she was quick, and sensible that it was but a sailor's bluntness; he was only a Dutch skipper; she waited till he crossed her path again.

'Have you often voyagers?' she inquired.

'No, the less the better, they are not all so brave as ma'mselle,' he added, softening a little, for the Dutch captain, although matter-of-fact and taciturn, had a Frau and a Töchterlein at home; 'but once I ran across with three Schottlander who gave little trouble; they lay in the hold all the days; if the frigate had marked us, they would have paid their passage with their heads, *alle witter!* the last time that I met one of them, he was very meagre, and his clothes they were worn; he begged me, yes, the Scotch hauptmann, for the loan of one thaler.'

'Have we far to journey on the land in order to reach my father?'

'No; my orders are to take m'amselle to the port, and the house is near by.'

'And how great is the distance to Strathmore?'

'Strathmore? I cannot tell; I go to Leith or Berwick; I know no more ports.'

Janet could get no intelligible information, she was left entirely to her own imagination; and the darkening night and the sough of the wind did not blanch her cheek or dim her eye. She watched the flakes of moonlight on the crested waves, and went below into the captain's cabin, vacated for her use. She was not sick, but St. Anna's cells were spacious

in comparison with this dormitory, and she—a girl brought up behind the *grille*—was the only woman among half-a-dozen strange men, on board ship, in the darkness, upon a stormy sea.

It was very hot and close; Janet could not sleep, but she never wished herself back at Rouen, teasing Sœur Thérèse, who was ever cross; watching her contention with Sœur Cecile, who could have ruled a kingdom and was a repressed whirlwind; helping Sœur Marie, who was always busy and always merry; screening Sœur Elizabeth, who slept half her time in spite of orisons, chants, and masses; laughing and playing with Charlotte, Amalie, and the little ones. She wondered if her father was like Père Joseph; if there were velvet hangings and carpets in the rooms of Glammis, as rich as their altar-cloth; Nannette had said there was nothing in France like them—the cabinets and mirrors, the pictures, the gold and silver plate; but better than these, Janet would see where Elizabeth More had left her footprints; where the Witch Countess had muttered her incantations, brewed her caldrons, and pierced with pin-pricks the waxen image of an anointed king, and, alas the day! quitted the green valley, the lordly chambers for the stake and faggots —the fiery way to the spirit land.

Would Nannette wonder? Nannette had been peevish, and had forgotten that Janet was her mistress' daughter; but Janet would be glad to see old Nannette, the only face in Scotland, not excepting her father's, that she had seen. She tried to recal her mother; the beautiful lofty lady, in her sweeping brocade, whom she had visited rarely and with awe,

who had regarded her sadly and caressed her by compulsion, sparingly—as if she, too, thought human affection an infirmity and sin—whom she had last beheld clasping the crucifix in her thin hands, her features pinched with the sharpness of death. Why was she so miserable, so solitary in exile? Why did she repel her only child?

Janet would not think of it; she would reckon over her cousins, she had drawn their names from Nannette, and chronicled them fast in her memory, —the young Duke of Hamilton, the children of the Earls of Galloway and Dundonald: would they receive her, welcome her, love her as Amalie and Charlotte had loved her? Ah, yes! she would make them love her; she would remember the Lord's lessons, and be humble, patient, and obliging: she had only been proud because in St. Anna's they did not know her; they could not tell to what she was entitled.

On which of Janet's gallant cousins would she bestow the lands and chateau of Strathmore? Ah! on the poorest and the proudest, as she had been; shy and self-distrustful perhaps when he appeared haughtiest. She would no longer be the heiress; he should have name and power and all; they would visit St. Anna's together, and gift her shrine richly.

The morning dawned on the grey sea, and again Janet sat in the prow, gazing intently in the direction whence land should arise; before night she would have landed in Scotland and beheld her father. At last, at last! They had been driven out of their course, but they were entering the Frith of Forth.

They had passed the spires and domes of St. Andrew's, where Beaton suffered—yonder was the wild rock, the Bass, the sea-mews screaming where martyrs sang—Berwick Law, and an English frigate riding at anchor, waiting subsidies—the Douglas hold of Tantallon—the smoke of Edinburgh, the capital, the royal Scottish capital, where Mary Stewart had reigned in turbulence and sorrow, and all accounts of whom Janet had devoured with such avidity. And there arose the steep Scottish hills which she waited to greet. There was none to point out the guardian Lion, ever watching the Castle keep crowning its rock; but passing green Inch Keith, like Inch Colm, fit islet for priory or nunnery to our Lady or her saints—more human residence than drear St. Kilda, lashed by the surf of the Atlantic—the captain touched his cap with more regard, in compliment, though she knew it not, to her courage and her silence, and bade her see the pier and the shipping of Leith amid the confused wilderness of buildings.

The May day was cloudy and squally, the afternoon light was cold and chill, and Janet's heart throbbed painfully. Nearer and nearer they drew to the sandy shore, lined with mingled masts and houses.

The land was a grant from the ill-fated Logans of Restalrig. From one of these timber-yards was launched, in 1511, 'Ane varie monstrous great ship, called the *Micheal*, that waisted all the woodes in Fyfe except Falkland wood, besides the timber that came out of Norway.' Here Hertford plundered and burnt; these green links could scarce contain the corpses with which the plague strewed them.

A pilot had boarded them; they were speeding up with the tide, already in a labyrinth of bustle and noise. The sailors and ship carpenters, the stout fish-wives (who reminded her somewhat of the Norman market-women), the carters, the porters, were vociferating in her native tongue, but it sounded uncouth and dissonant in the girl's longing ears. She was bewildered and giddy when they lay-to against the pier in a vacant berth, stopping with a shock. The Dutch captain had to take hold of her arm and apprise her, with a grave smile, that the man stepping upon the plank thrown out from the shore was ma'mselle's father, Master George Forbes.

Janet shook like a leaf, but by a great effort she lifted her eyes: there stood a man of massive frame and regular but phlegmatic features, in the green hunting-coat and yellow buckskins of a country gentleman. He advanced first to the skipper.

'So, captain, you have brought my goods. Here, take your promised freight; I'm bound to you for your carriage of kittle ware.'

The captain bowed a little bow, and looked as if he had nothing more to do with the pair.

'Janet, you are welcome, lass; but I have little time to spare;' he looked at her for one moment steadily, and then averted his eyes: he neither needed nor desired lingering recognition. 'Get out your baggage, and be ready to march.'

He was as cool as if they had been as well acquainted as other fathers and daughters; as if their first meeting was not cursed with memories.

He was a fine-looking man, with a grand air. He might have been a soldier, or, what the Countess

had him nominated in the mock creation of St. Germain, Master of the Horse to James VIII.; but his tone, and the touch to her hand and cheek, seemed cold and harsh to the impulsive French girl. For the first time a heavy shadow of doubt and dismay fell upon her splendid visions.

But she tucked up her skirts and claimed her mails, great leathern trunks surmounted by an S. and a coronet, though they were but half full of the remnants of ancestral finery—the petticoats and mantles, the hoods and frills, the ruby necklace and the diamond buckles, that had once shone in a Court —so cherished and hoarded.

George Forbes gave a glance at the extent of Janet's treasures, tucked her hand under his arm, threw a word over his shoulder to a sailor to bring up the rear with the traps, and strode on shore with his daughter. They entered into the clamour and confusion of the quay, and it closed upon them. George Forbes neither looked to the right hand nor to the left, neither paused. Janet was borne along, overwhelmed, until they turned into a dark, narrow, crowded thoroughfare, the Tolbooth-wynd, and stopped before a tall old black-browed house, with arms carved above the doorway.

'So, we have arrived, Janet,' said George Forbes, mounting a steep outer stair, and again looking at the girl who was so like the proud madam who would make him a gentleman.

'It is an auberge,' said Janet to herself, as he rasped the pin, while she fought against swift and horrible fancies of robbery and murder, with which this sombre tenement seemed consistent.

It had many inmates, however, congregating on its stair, and at its doors and windows. Surely some one would help her if she shrieked murder! The door was opened by a yellow-haired woman of thirty, dressed like the farmer's daughter of the Dean, save that she wore a dingy cap, the token of her matronly rank, and that the rest of her dress—the calimanco petticoat, the striped jacket and kerchief, the wide-checked cotton apron—were soiled and slovenly. At her skirts were three small children, whose scanty raiment suffered a daily immersion in the gutter. Their faces were unwashed, their lint-white hair uncombed, and contrasting strongly with their bronzed and smutched, peeping faces; in the remote background was a routed-looking servant girl, with scarcely ampler drapery than the house urchins.

The moment the mother's eyes fell on the arrival she smoothed the furrows between her close-set eyes.

'Effie,' said George Forbes, 'I bring you my daughter Janet.'

'Eh, I am glad to see Janet! glad to see you, lass!' she exclaimed, in a tone of wheedling blandishment, putting her hands on Janet's shoulders, and drawing her across the threshold into the dark, dirty kitchen, where her day's housewifery was not half accomplished; where porridge and kail pots, jugs and trenchers, torn loaves of bread, children's self-invented playthings, gaudy ribands, wooden chairs, half-open press-beds, were mingled in the most dire confusion with whips, spurs, martingales, and riding-boots. Janet resisted the attempt to lead her into

the mean and disorderly chamber so offensive to her eye.

'Who are you?' she asked her hostess, with the old abruptness which had so disturbed the unworldly prioress of St. Anna—a flame beginning to glow in her eye and on her cheek.

'Who am I!' exclaimed the woman in her coaxing, honeyed accents, 'wha suld I be, but Effie Watson, George Forbes's wife, and your ain loving gude-mother.'

'It is a lie!' cried the poor girl, fiercely; 'my mother, a noble lady, lies in holy earth in the kingdom of France, and this villainous town, this miserable house, is not Glammis, of Strathmore.

Effie began to whimper and to raise her apron to her eyes; George Forbes leant against the table, his arms crossed. 'I'll tell you what, my fine daughter, once for all,' he said, 'have done with this folly; you mind me more than is safe of the mother that bore you—that noble lady in holy earth in the kingdom of France—that wedded me, and scorned me; but, by Heaven, I paid her scorn for scorn! Are you such an idiot as to believe—or what designing loon has deceived you, that the Earl, with his high head and his blue blood, had the will, if he had the power, to resign his grand barony to me, his wanton gude sister's low-born man? Curse the whole race, away with them! But I'm willing to support my eldest bairn with the rest; so lay aside your silly, flaunting finery and devil's delusions, and work like an honest woman, and do Effie's will, and there shall be no more of this, nor ony odds between you and the callants; but you shall share

bite and sup, and sit at the ingle neuk as long as you will.'

Though he became more calm as he ended, Janet cowered at the raised arm and the furious oath; her desperation leaping up, fell before the man's dour wrath and revenge: and she sank down on the nearest settle—a curious figure in that place—her skirts drooping around her, her feathered hat weighing down the head that had borne it so lightly, in dull, dead despair.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TOLBOOTH-WYND.

GEORGE FORBES was moody and morose even to cruelty, but originally neither mean nor unjust. In service he had been faithful and zealous; nay, he had warned the wilful and impassioned countess of the probable consequences of her rash step. Though the future strife had run equally high between the unhappy couple, still after long separation and death had severed the luckless tie which bound them, his conscience testified to him of the unknown daughter, the fruit of their union. He was willing to perform, however late, a parent's part by the orphan, for whom her mother—lavish and wasteful, cut off with short warning—had not provided, and who had grown to woman's estate, and was subsisting mainly on the charity of the religious house in Rouen, where she had been placed a *pensionnaire*.

George Forbes was incapable of comprehending

how futile or how fatal his effort in her behalf might prove; he had half forgotten, as he had always despised—like a stoic according to some, like a brute to others—the comforts and luxuries, the gewgaws and glitter, the elegance and dignity, the inexpressible refinements of his wretched exaltation at Strathmore. The contempt of the class into which he was temporarily elevated, gnawing into a stolid but stern character, had far more than counterbalanced these exaggerated advantages; and, in his own eyes, he was now a much more respectable, as he was certainly an infinitely happier man, keeper of livery stables in Leith, than he had been as master of the stately castle of Glammis. He had skill in horses, was a daring rider, and altogether rather a prosperous man in his station, though Effie Watson was at once too niggardly and too lazy to manage his means to any satisfactory result.

George Forbes was indifferent on the matter so long as his meals were sufficiently punctual, and his lightest word a law. He had a contempt for all womankind, not excepting Effie; but Effie was his wife, under his protection and care—and for her yellow hair and former lily skin, and her unqualified submission, his choice; while Lady Strathmore had wooed and wedded him, and driven him rough-shod over a wild road. He meant that Janet should be as well off as the other buxom, thoughtless, but tightly-held and frequently hard-worked girls in the Wynd, the daughters of its skippers and store-keepers. He did not foresee the ignorance and the foreign rearing that had utterly misled Janet as to his circumstances, and which, her eyes being opened, rendered them

abhorrent to her. He was inclined, for Janet's own sake, to support Effie's authority in everything. Not that Effie openly complained; she was a narrow-minded, jealous-tempered woman, cowardly and cunning; but her feebleness of nature might have rendered her malice petty, had it not been for Janet's susceptibility to her influence, and the peculiar circumstances which had crushed the girl, and might render any incessant small warfare of hint and sneer the additional drops that brimmed over her cup.

Where were all Janet's visions now? How did her high spirit sustain the reverse to which she was called? For the great valley, and its waving woods, and green pastures, and heather-clad boundaries—the trading town of Leith, in the filth of the last century; for her mother's halls and towers, with their traditional glories, and their recorded and too well-remembered graces—the crowded, squalid, rude habitation of a horse-breaker, wherein she was an alien and an intruder. She had been fain to come to Scotland—she had borne the voyage so gallantly—and for this!

Her father was terrible to Janet Forbes. She recognised the fascination that had bewitched her mother; but it affected her differently. His loud voice, his sullen manner, his severity, even to his favoured younger children, terrified her. When she had thought him a noble Scotch gentleman, she had resented his desertion; but she had entertained some natural affection for him, and this she had fanned lately into a flickering but bright blaze. Now, there was nothing in her mind concerning him but aversion and fear. For Effie Watson, his wife, whose guile she would have loathed in another—she was nothing

to her—nor were the tattered heathen imps of children, so different from the little ones who wore white surplices, tuned their infant voices, and folded their baby hands, at St. Anna's—she would have stared at them in amazement, had her heart not been sick.

Poor fanciful, passionate Janet! she was indeed dashed down by the tempest, and laid low with the ground. She sat day after day, white, shrinking, and gloomy, in the remotest corner of the kitchen—a marvel to the uncongenial world around her, and to herself no less—while Effie dawdled here and there, gossiped with her long-tongued neighbours, or pinched and slapped the screaming children, and gave even the servant lass, Maillie, 'her paiks.' Effie did not seek the assistance which Janet was so unfit to render, and which would otherwise have been coveted, because she was distrustful of interference with her own foolish plans and successions of blunders: and, knowing her husband's inveterate prejudices and dogged will, she was bent upon keeping Janet in the background; and not 'raising a stick to break her own head,' by permitting Janet to become necessary to her father. Janet had no idea of baulking her; she hoped for nothing—poor ill-regulated heart!—but death: only in two instances did she oppose her stepmother's asserted power.

Janet was brought up in the Protestant faith, both parents professing it, until her mother was in the immediate presence of death. The underhand example and authority of the Priory had not overthrown Janet's creed. She had sufficient ability and mental activity to make herself acquainted with the grounds of

difference between the churches, and the common foundation on which they rested; and she continued to cling to her own with the same secret tenacity with which she pined for Scotland, and the realization of Nannette's pictures of the houses of Cochrane and Lyon. Ah! the thistle had pierced the hand of the poor lady between the laurel wreaths (when did laurels ever bring other than sorrow to women?), in the person of her luckless young ally; and never had Lyon more need to lend to Cochrane his motto, and to subjoin to *'Virtute et labore,' 'In te, Domine, speravi.'*

Nevertheless, Janet wore an ebony cross on her bosom, and in the wreck of all her earthly hopes she looked fondly and pitifully on the parting gift of Mère Ursule. Effie, like most lax performers, was rigidly orthodox in profession: she was scandalized at this idolatrous sign. What would good Mr. Ross think if he knew it within her doors? She raised an outcry against the abomination, and called upon Janet to cast it aside as pollution. But Janet stood at bay; she clasped her crucifix, and opening her eyes, refused—in an indignant outburst of French, an unknown tongue to Effie, and almost as suspicious as the original object of discord—to relinquish her relic. George Forbes was appealed to, but after listening to a few of Effie's querulous sentences he turned on his heel; here she could gain no victory: in his opinion Janet was a fool to cherish a slip of wood; but Effie was also a fool to make 'words' on so idle a matter. His impassibility was proof against fanaticism.

The other act of rebellion was Janet's declining, by

most uncompromising speech and gesture, to adopt such a dress as Effie's. She had a threadbare black velvet dress in her mother's wardrobe, and this she assumed as most befitting her sad fortunes; and with her dark hair turned back and wreathed like a coronet, she had something of the look of a queen even in her wretched surroundings. George Forbes was not sufficiently observant to note the discrepancy; or his eye soon grew accustomed to it: Effie, so lately foiled, was too wary to venture on another direct attack to compass her end; but be sure Janet did not lose an enemy by her resistance, and her melancholy dignity.

For one whole month, while May was merging into June, Janet sat a dumb, motionless, Vandyke-like statue, queer and pathetic, in her littered, noisy, and ill-flavoured prison: but flesh and blood could do no more; she came one day, with a fragment of spider-like lace hanging over her slender fingers, to Effie, peeling potatoes and rocking the cradle.

'I worked so in France,' she said; 'English ladies came and bought; I work again and give it to you, and you sell it, you know the people, and you keep the money.'

'Oh! very well, Jenny; I'll be blithe to see you commence, for to my mind you must be bursting, keeping your hands over each other; and I may find customers, for I'm well kent, and no that ill-liked; there is the Provost's lady; and Miss Christy Cranstoun, up in Edinburgh, that my niece serves; and Lady Semple in the same close; and it is a fine-lady work, and will not fyle your fingers like sic jobs as mine. Sirs, wives and mothers are ill off

now-a-days;—lie still, wee Geordie, ye little deil, will you never wink an ee?' abjured Effie, burning with envy at Janet's pretensions; but, in spite of herself, controlled by the girl's manner, and itching to possess a *mutch* of that delicate manufacture which her woman's eye convinced her a duchess might have owned. Miss Christy Cranstoun washed her ruffles with her own hands in her sweet pot, but her roses and scallops and fairy tracery were nothing to the intricate work manœuvred by these small bobbins and dexterous hands. From that time Janet laboured continuously, sometimes at lace, sometimes at silk embroidery, which Effie disposed of, through her own superior acquaintances, or those of her niece, unscrupulously retaining the profits. The wholesome effects of labour soon became apparent even in this untoward case; the whiteness passed from Janet's cheek, the fixedness from her eye. When people ceased to make her a gazing-stock, she carried her work to the stair-head—similar resorts were popular down the whole line of the street—and would gaze curiously on the traffic and huckstering and frequent commotion below. Passers-by glancing up were startled by the apparition of the quaint and rich dress, the novel and peculiar bloom of the young worker, the application, or idle speculation of her attitude. But spectators were not so impressed as they would have been at a later and smoother period; for these days engulphed most men in their own affairs, or presented to them many a singular inconsistency and broad contrast.

Sometimes Janet chanted to herself her Latin hymns, sometimes she signalled to her little brothers,

and strove to establish an intermediate language, something between her halting English and their lisping Scotch—for Janet had, with natural instinctive goodness, passed the gulf between herself and the little ones, and tried to make them her friends; —and though they struggled from her hold, dabbled her hands and her gown, entangled her thread, shouted at her, charged her with sticks and stones, and resisted furiously when she went so far as to try to wash their encrusted skins, they yet laughed at her droll gestures and looks, and hid behind her, and once or twice fell asleep against her knee. Then, the engrained faces were no longer ugly, and the vagabond habits were forgotten, and—like an anchor to a foundering ship, or a rope to a drowning man—this pliability of the poor human heart vindicated itself, extending a saving interest to Janet, that her smarting heart might soften, her isolated, famished mind find meat and drink.

Janet had but a nominal, unavoidable intercourse with Effie, and almost none at all with her father, who was little at home, and totally disinclined to win a silent, downcast girl into words and smiles. From the friends and acquaintances of the house she was equally apart. There were not many visitors at George Forbes's house in the Tolbooth-wynd. Effie had her relatives and her cronies with whom she quarrelled and was reconciled without a pause; these individuals came and ate her bread and drank her sack, mostly when George Forbes was absent, and they were not likely persons to affect that set-up, play-actress Madam, George Forbes's French daughter. George Forbes himself was a man of few

friends, and he met his customers usually at his stables or at a tavern. The daily routine was rarely broken save by the Sabbath, and the kirk seat in St. Ninian's. Effie worked and nursed her children, and had fits of darning and scouring, and a good deal of sly visiting; George Forbes came in to his meals, and mused in his great chair, with the light of the lamp falling on his classic, iron face; and Janet Forbes wove in her corner, or retired to her little bed in the dark closet off the landing, which she shared with Maillie, a reckless, dumbfoundered, unlucky lass, whom she learnt to pity.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOLDIER OF BUNKER'S HILL.

THE July sun shone upon the Dean, the sky was blue above the twin Lomonds, and their shadows were strong and deep; among the red bells of the heather, rose the crosses of white bed-straw, the spikes of the blue and pink milk-wort, and far, far up, where hidden brooklets rendered the soil soft and mossy, telling of long past April showers and May mornings in the valley below, the pale stars of the primroses still set meekly at the foot of the slender herb-willow.

There were roses in the Dean garden, and red strawberries below their broad leaves; and John Lauder often leant in the evenings over the little wicket, though the blackbirds no longer sang in the den, and the burn had ceased to babble; but it was

pleasant to look into the still, leafy recesses, and turn to the hills or the fields, and meet the air fresh from the heather, or sweet from the hay and the blossoming beans—the air that hung over the black Tolbooth-wynd of Leith, heavy with smoke, and vile with a thousand fermenting impurities. In the summer heat, Mrs. Lauder shivered over her wide kitchen fire, and smiled on the healthy and strong. Simon Lauder laid down his sythe and bent over his page, and saw, in the dewy gloaming, Cincinnatus in his fields, and blue-eyed strong-limbed Cato among the husbandmen and homesteads of Tusculum. And with rapt face and unconscious feet, Anne worked for all, and heeded none, or fretted at them with sickly disgust—her body wasting, her heart-strings straining and cracking under Jamie Herriot's sin and doom. So men and women have been beaten by dreams; have madly sung themselves to death, their last sob drawn in wild, wilful melody; have danced to death, their springing footfall stiffening into the rigidity of a corpse; have died with eyes shining in mystic trances or ecstatic visions, or dark with great horror amid the street cries of common life, the near anguish of affection calling to them in vain.

John Lauder went out to his work in the glorious summer morning, when the earth was glittering with millions of diamonds, and the sky was clear and light, and the teeming life of the world beginning to flutter and stir; and saw a man standing in the den, half hidden by the trees, but seeming to watch the farm-house, whose chimney was already sending out its hospitable smoke, its house-dog shaking itself,

its cock crowing loud and shrill. The indistinct lineaments and carriage of the man were known to John Lauder, and his heart gave a great bound—for that was a generation when men spoke undoubtingly of the bar on Lady Besborough's wrist, and of young Ardholm, who saw his own bloody and shrouded wraith days and weeks before his murder. As John gazed, the man emerged from his shelter, and the hair fell on John Lauder's head, and the creeping of his flesh ceased; for John recognised Allan Herriot, Jamie Herriot's brother, whom he had not encountered face to face, or stricken hands with, at kirk, market, or bridal, for many a month. He went down to meet him now, and the young men saluted each other gravely, but not with unfriendliness, and strolling into the den, sat down together by mutual suggestion, on the ivy-clad trunk of an old tree torn up by a long past storm, and bridging their path. They looked at the dark glossy leaves of the beech nearest them, at the bright-eyed squirrel darting along its branches, at the purple foxglove, and the long, white, dead man's fingers standing up like time-posts among the yellowing ferns; they talked of ordinary occurrences—of their crops, their cattle, the news respecting their acquaintances, the last week's sermon. At last John Lauder stood up, leaning upon his hoe, and steadily confronting his companion: 'Allan,' he said, 'if you have come at last to seek satisfaction from me for Jamie's charges, you must go as you came, for I will not fight, either with pistol, or sword, or stick, or neive. I'll bear your ban, but there's enough harm done up yonder, without our passions adding more. You may be spared

at hame, I cannot, and what's mair, I will not; for I hold that vengeance is neither yours nor mine; or it might have descended long ere now; and that the auld mode of redding up quarrels was not the best—and Allan, I think you will not strike if I hold back my hand?'

'John Lauder,' said Allan Herriot, sadly, 'I'm not like to fight this summer morning; you speak in ignorance. I have sure word that my brother Jamie was slain months syne across the Atlantic, in the bloody battle of Bunker's Hill.'

'God forgive him!' exclaimed John Lauder, solemnly.

'Ay, John,' Allan continued, more eagerly, and with less constraint; 'you mind Jamie—ance the frankest and freest, the handsomest and kindest in the house, and the most favoured—and now the sun is shining on the Lomond-hills, and the Dean wood is waving o'er you and me, and he will never plough, or ride, or whistle mair. We dare not name him where he lies, cauld and stiff, among the heaps of friends and foes, and plundered, unburied dead, at a part in the New World which we never saw, or heard tell of, till the word of this battle came to the King and Parliament in London.'

'Man,' answered John, with simple seriousness, 'this branch was white and fragrant in May, and it will be black and bare in November; and this mossy stane, that has lain there for years, with one spurn of my foot I can bury it in the narrow channel of the burn, no more seen, no more trodden on, no more wet with the dew and warmed with the sun—and I ween human life is sic like.'

'I have heard, John, that Anne has rued her deed.'

'I think, Allan Herriot, that my sister Anne has nothing to rue. If she did not care for Jamie, or mistrusted him when he sought her, she had a full right to her will and judgment; and if she had been as strong as she is mild, she might have been a blithe woman like my mother all her days. But, for as calm as she was, Anne was tender, and would have none punished, if she kenned or could help it—and Jamie Herriot has been able to break her heart.'

'I have been sent for to meet the Sherrie, John; he has had a letter from Captain Bruce, deponing that on the field of Bunker's Hill, among other men of his regiment that joined the great charge, there fell a brave soldier, named James Balingall. The captain himself saw him, when the battle was but begun, ere they thought of a defeat, lying with a bayonet stab in his breast and another in his thigh. Captain Bruce would have had him lifted to the rear, but he said, no, he wanted to gasp his last on the sod beneath the open sky; but he cried that he had something to confess, if any merciful man would but hear him make a clean breast there before he passed to the judgment-seat of the Almighty, so the captain sent for the chaplain, and the chaplain wrote the rest. The dying soldier's name was not Balingall—you can guess, John—but Herriot, and he was a native of the county of Fife, not far from the captain's own estate, though by reason of the captain's English upbringing, Jamie was a stranger to him. Jamie Herriot had fled from Fife, we ken wherefore, John; now he was a repentant man, and inasmuch as the

greatest sinner may return at the last hour, the English minister, bless him! comforted him, and he grew composed, like a man who has a hope in his end—but he pleaded that justice should be satisfied, and his friends advised of his death—and he was urgent that word should be sent to a girl in Scotland, one Anne Lauder of the Dean, between whom and him there had been love passages, and discord, but as he seemed to apprehend that she was now in tribulation regarding his fate, Jamie bade her forgive him and take heart, for, wretch as he was, he had found an honourable death beyond his desert on the battlefield; he had caught a grip of the Saviour's cross, and, please God, he would meet her yet in heaven in peace and joy. So, John, I have delivered his last errand, and I wish you grace to bring it to her ears; and, lad, our quarrel is ended and we part friends,' and the young men shook hands and separated as after a compact.

John Lauder told the tale to his father when they were hidden by the smoke of the burning whins, and Simon Lauder spoke of God's righteous retribution, and of the mercy that mingles with sacrifice, but never a word of pitiless, unholy joy at his enemies' destruction. John whispered it to his mother in the cheerfulness of her chimney corner, and the bright eyes, bright with the fever in the blood, and the warm heart that no fever could by comparison cool, brimmed with moisture, and the weak voice vibrated like a chord of sweetest, saddest music—for the widow robbed of her son, and the young lad that might have been a gay bridegroom and a douce father, rushing red-handed to a violent death.

Offensive to John Lauder seemed the jests of the farm-servants, the glow of the fireside, the gambols of his dogs, the very bubbling of the great pot that night: he was glad to go to the door, and look up at the single pure star trembling in the blue vault, and hear only the flapping of the bat's wings, and the hoot of the white owl from the barn eaves. He had promised to break the tidings to Anne; he had bidden them not send for the minister; he did not fear the mission—and so natural was it for the very heads of the family to depend upon the son John, that they deferred to his decision, and implicitly relied upon his fortitude. Simon was a man of wisdom and learning, but he was more versed in dead men's lore than in women's hearts, and he was growing old and was unnerved and agitated; gentle, joyous Mrs. Lauder might have pitifully dealt an inevitable wound, unscathed herself, and to the healing of another, but John would spare her all care and trouble.

He hung about the yard and the house next day, inspecting and repairing pens, halters, troughs, wheels, and ropes, tending the very vegetables in the garden, smoothing down every rough mound, and lopping off every unsightly branch; again and again he approached Anne to wile her to climb the hill or to descend into the den, or bring water from the spout-well, or cut clover for her pet cow, or gather groundsel for her bird—but Anne suspecting a secret intention, and a wish for private converse, or from mere frowardness, perpetually negatived his purpose. At last he stood on the kitchen floor, at the usual dinner hour, Anne spinning at her wheel, his mother

holding her knitting and gazing wistfully in his face, and the servant lasses outside conveying the groats from the kiln.

'Mother,' he said, distinctly, 'there's been tidings of Jamie Herriot; he was slain lang syne in America.'

Anne Lauder fell back against the wall as if she had been shot; that doleful sound, long expected, had pierced the dull senses, and quivered to the bones and marrow.

'I have been merciful to Anne, mother,' said John Lauder, wildly, as he raised her; 'I have killed her on the spot.'

'Whisht, whisht, my dear lad; carry her to her bed, and she will be well.'

Well! no, not well, but not lifeless, not insensible; and John Lauder repeated faithfully to these gushes of breath, closed eyes and clasped hands, every syllable that had reached him—besought her, caressed her, prayed for her. But Anne lay for days, taking food when they gave it, but with no further sign, until one night of soft summer rain, she opened her eyes, and looked out on her bed with its patched quilt, her little mirror on the wall, the old press with all the linen her own hands had spun, the lavender drying in the window, her mother propped up in her chair by her head. A motion, a melting came over the white face, 'Mother, you tending me that needs tending yoursell—that I was wont to tend;' she repeated, pathetically.

'I have tended you mony a time, Anne, and I'm blithe to be permitted to watch my bairn—blithe if I could but do her good.'

'You aye do good, dear mother,' said Anne, vaguely. 'Mother, send for John.'

'John is out about, my dear, speaking to Will Carstairs, that's just come from Kinross.'

'Mother, bid John come.'

John was summoned, and bent over his sister. She smiled as she saw him—a smile like a moonbeam—and he was then for the first time struck with her resemblance to their mother; both faces wan and chastened, the one by fell disease, the other by the spirit's throes. Anne put her arms round his neck.

'My dear brother John,' she said, 'I've been dreaming how you carried me in your arms—me, a wee lassie, to seek for birds' nests in the den—like an only brother and sister as we were. And do you mind of our dog 'Keep,' and how we fed him daily with our porridge, and how we hid ourselves and grat together when he died on the door-stane—a blind, stiff old hound? And now, John, you will go, and my mother will help me to rise; and I will come ben and set the supper, and see that my father's ale is toasted, and my mother's white wine whey made; and I will boil sowens for you and for me.'

'But you have been ill, my lamb; you maun wait till you are strong,' interposed her mother, anxiously. Anne looked in her mother's face.

'I am dizzy, mother, but oh! let me try. We'll forget that I was ill; we'll forget and forgive what's washed out, and we will never, never speak of it again, or vex each other more;—but let me serve you this night, or I will dee.'

So Anne rose and ministered unto them, unsteadily and fitfully for these first July days, but always more consciously and contentedly, more in her right mind, until they thought that it was their own Anne Lauder restored to the Dean—almost as if Jamie Herriot had been spared to come back from the wars a changed man, and had wedded Anne Lauder and settled close to the Dean, and sent her every day to greet and to gladden her old friends. Only there was something on Anne Lauder's brow and about her guileless mouth that, when she was happiest, would make the hearts that loved her yearn, and the eyes that looked on her dim, but not with sorrow—with a joy that was so pure, it was almost pain.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LEITH RACES.

THE jubilee of Leith was come: the August race-week, when the nobility and the gentry of Southern Scotland—the Maitlands, Homes, Scotts, Mortons—flocked to Edinburgh, and day after day hurried down to its unaristocratic port, to enjoy the spectacle which its sandy shore presented, and supplement it by dancing dogs, Punches, cockfights, and formidable rows between the mixed mob and the detachment of the old Highland city guard, more effective then, than in later days, and sent thither to keep or to break the general peace.

Skirting the whole line of sands, ran booths, exposing for sale refreshments—pies, rounds of beef,

hot potatoes, cakes, bread and cheese, dried fish, brown dulse, sack, claret, Hollands, whisky; with stalls of various wares—fruit from the Mediterranean, tallow from the Baltic, cheese and butter from Gouda and Altona, crockery from Delft, fine cloth from Flanders, articles of home apparel, great boots and seamen's coats, and especially women's gear, beavers and bodices, caps and streamers supplied close at hand, and sure to tempt purchasers where the weaker sex abounded, and could practise unlimited chaffering.

Between this gay and boisterous border and the sea was the course. Along the hard sands the horses ran, the cups and crowns were won, and the pier was the stand from which the better classes in thousands viewed the scene. The sea waves curled forward on the bold riders; the shipping rose around, many a flag at maintop and bow, many a gilded or white figure-head pressing forward for precedence, with the yards of the vessels manned by blue-jackets; and, towering above the background of dark houses, the ancient spires of St. Mary's and St. Ninian's commanded the whole scene—the starting post, the winning goal, the strife, the spectators, the distant sloop bearing down, all unconscious of the races, on the transformed and monopolized harbour.

George Forbes was a leading man at these races; he supplied many horses; he frequently rode himself; he was an authority of weight. Effie was at the height of her ambition; her usual slip-shod habiliments exchanged for the opposite extreme of her damask wedding-gown, her mode scarf, her rustic straw bonnet and cherry-coloured ribands,

with her boys thoroughly washed once in a year, and inducted into new corduroys. Her husband's influence enabled her to secure a good place on the pier, where she could see and be seen, gape and stare at her betters, bandy jests and repartee with her equals. Janet, too, was there, her black velvet gown surmounted by a scarlet cloak and hood, and her heart once more beating with pleasure, and her face flushing with excitement, for she was young, and the world was wagging merrily around her, and it was like inspiration to witness and make one again in a *fête* and a holiday.

The principal contest of the day was just over—amidst the cheers of the multitude, George Forbes had galloped in before baron, knight, and groom; and Janet felt a new sensation of pride as all eyes rested with vehement approbation on his distinguished stature—his chiselled, immovable features.

'Geordie Forbes has out-ridden himself to-day, Mistress Forbes,' said a voice at Janet's elbow, as a young man in long vest and lace cravat, cocked hat and hanging rapier, pushed by, but suddenly arresting himself, addressed Effie and stared at Janet.

Effie curtsied low, for she recognised Master Kennedy, akin to Cassilis, and was in no small degree flattered and puffed up by his public salutation.

'George does his best, sir, to please the public and do credit to his stable and his employers; but it is not all profit—the mashes and the hot drinks, the covers and airings, and combings and washings, that Fireflaught costs, leave the purse of sovereigns clean out of sight; but if George Forbes did not

ride for his own hand, though I say it, he need not do so for other men's siller. I wot folk wonder that he ventures his neck so lightly, but it is for honour he risks it.'

'No doubt, no doubt, mistress, and he bears the bell, and his mares have as few flaws as jades can well show. Forgive me, Mistress Forbes. And what bonny lass is this you have under your sleeve, this fine day?'

'It is my gude dochter, Janet Forbes, an' please you, sir.'

'You with a daughter as tall as yourself! Fie, Mistress Forbes! how can you suffer it? Where did my friend Geordie get his metal when he made up to you with so fair an incumbrance?'

''Deed I heard little word of her, Master Kennedy,' simpered Effie, 'for she was in France till this summer.'

'And this is Lady Strathmore's chick! I am your humble servant, Mistress Janet. We are sib in our antecedents. Have you e'er heard how the Countess of Cassilis forsook Culzean for the tent of a gipsy Davie?'

Janet was abashed at the bold eyes, and incensed at the insolent tone, although she but half comprehended the allusion; but Master Kennedy was one of the rakehelly members of the wild Edinburgh clubs, on whose fevered cheek, inflamed eyes, and haggard, though still youthful, aspect, no regard less silly or less vain than Effie Watson's could have rested with favour.

'What ails your hand, Master Kennedy?' inquired Effie, for his arm was bandaged, and in a sling.

He laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and whispered confidentially, 'Do you not know, Mistress Forbes, that they have got a London fashion of what they call *knockers* up in the new town of Edinburgh, which we gentlemen cannot resist? But, whiles, they cost us dear. Hark you, fingers as well as nails have been wrung off and left behind, when we were on the spree, with sufficient claret beneath the belt.'

'Gude save us, Master Kennedy! how can you be so wild and cruel?'

'Tuts, you are ower kind, mistress. Drummond from the Carse lampooned Millar of Inveresk, and they fought last night behind the Luckenbooths; and Drummond is a-dying, and Inveresk in hiding at this moment.'

Janet was sedulously looking in the opposite direction, and drawing behind Effie's fine feathers, and longing that some mere burgher wife would interrupt the colloquy, when a tall, dashing-looking man, in the pink of silk stockings and smart points, caught Kennedy by the arm, and hurried him forward, to laugh at his richest joke, and roar at his broadest buffoonery—to help to settle a disputed point in which the stranger was the keenest of principals. Well might his thrifty housewife shake her head, and allege, 'Ah, Harry, you keep all your tears for your books.' The eager, gleeful man upon the turf was bred to the serious study of the law, and born to the ermine—was one of the most elegant and sentimental of authors—Henry Mackenzie.

'Janet Forbes, what makes you tug at my fringes, and propose to go hame? The races are not mair than half ower, and the company are all here yet,

and I have merchandize to buy; and more than that, am I to move at your idle will?'

Effie was hot and fatigued, and approaching a fit of peevishness.

'If Mistress Janet is tired,' hesitated a respectable, elderly tradesman in wig and spectacles, and snuff-brown coat, one of George Forbes's few personal friends, 'I am bound that gate; I will see her to the Tolbooth-wynd.'

He had marked her as a modest, industrious lass, notwithstanding her unfortunate descent, one evidently thrust aside in her father's house; he had witnessed her annoyance and fear at Master Kennedy's notice—but his own benevolence was not disinterested, nevertheless.

'For pity's sake go your way, Janet, and dinna say to your father that I keepit you here; you were fond enough to come out to the sport, and you'll be as bent on it the morn; but when the fancy takes you just run away hame. Master Wardlaw, I am obliged to you.'

Janet went gladly; she had such confidence in her escort that she cared not that their course was slow —nay, that they came to an actual pause when there was a fresh race, and the sun, breaking out behind an envious cloud, lit up the champing, stamping horses—with gay ribands plaited into their long manes, gilded the rejoicing concourse, and fell aslant in rays of glory on the sea.

But as they approached the tents, from one where stoups of wine were flowing, dice rattling, and oaths resounding, a group of gentlemen issued, staggering, and whooping, and driving here and there the un-

offending populace; and from another, where there were usquebagh, and cakes, and bacon, a sailor shouted that he was robbed, and a man struck out as the champion of the circle of frail, brazen women screaming and shaking their fists in denial of the shameful charge; and while a ring was called to settle the dispute in a summary manner, Master Wardlaw was fain to insist upon a passage for himself and his companion, and to hurry Janet from such questionable contact.

The sly tradesman attempted, awkwardly enough, to converse with Janet, and to entertain her and coax her to the best of his ability; and Janet, removed for the hour from the incubus that haunted her, looked up and answered him, in her tripping tongue, with an innocent *espièglerie* of face and voice that has been many a douce old man's destruction, and now appeared what she was when not under a chill—as bonny and brilliant a lass as ever trod the green.

'So you like the races, Mistress Janet? But you would fancy first-footings, and Mayings more. I warrant you wonder that an auld carle should discourse about them; but when I was a hafflin apprentice to the wig-block, there was a master wig-maker, Mistress Janet, a chappie with shining black een, and a tongue that would have wiled the bird off the tree, that wrote grand sangs and caused all Edinburgh to stand about—ane Allan Ramsay, Mistress Janet.'

'I do not know him,' said Janet, with such comical emphasis that Master Wardlaw chuckled.

'But you've seen the *Gentle Shepherd*, Mistress Janet?'

'No, I have seen merchants, farmers, messieurs, here, *not* gentle, but no shepherd; but in France they have them with dogs and crooks, and they paint them—so charming, on porcelain.'

'But this is a book, Mistress Janet—the finest book you ever read.'

'There is not but one book all that, monsieur,' said Janet, with a brisk reproval; 'and I have it, and a psalter, of which they know not. But I have a great ennui; I desire other books, and if you will lend me your one I will try and read it, and comprehend it.'

'Willingly, willingly, Mistress Janet. Everybody in Scotland kens it well; but mind, it's not mine—it's Allan Ramsay's. And pay heed to the good council that Peggy gives to Jenny. And is there nothing mair that I could do for you? See, it's a custom in Scotland for a man to give a lass her fairing at the race-stands here. Now, what would you like, Mistress Janet—a neckerchief, or a pair or flowered mittens, or what shall it be?'

'Is it to me? Will my father—You are very polite. I will take this little box; only this box with the tableau on the lid, the same as those in dear France. Oh see! monsieur, there are French words—*Tour de Notre Dame.* Oh! *mon cœur, mon cœur!*'

'And you will mind the payment, Mistress Janet, when we are better acquent?'

'What payment? You paid. I have no money but three crowns.'

'Hout, hout, think no more about it. Here's the wynd, and here's your house, deserted enough—but

there's cripple Tam with the key, since Maillie too is abroad. Will you have meat and drink to take, bairn, or can you make it ready for yourself and the rest awa'?'

'*Tien!* Yes, I could cook such a *pot pourri*, monsieur, if—if I were with myself in Normandie.'

'You maun learn to forget Normandy, like a good lass, and you maun speak plain Scotch, and give up these queer words.'

'Then I will fail to say *Au revoir!* I will say to meet again, monsieur.'

'That will we, mistress Janet.'

CHAPTER VII.

MASTER KENNEDY AND THE WIG-MAKER.

THE long days were drawing in: September was setting on a goodly wealth of yellow sheaves and troops of stout bandsters, and blithe shearers hurrying home from their toil—and on the first whaleship sailing with huzzas and thanksgivings into Leith-roads.

Janet Forbes was sitting in the afternoon shadows, working her lace, on the stair-head—and watching two girls, sisters, chatting and washing together at a tub placed on the opposite landing, to the great inconvenience of the passers up and down, on whom they rained jests and soap-suds. Janet was putting her hands to her ears to shut out the groans of a bagpipe blown by a ragged Highlander, and thinking how cold it was, and how soon she must go in to the

smoky, dull neuk, where there was no event after the capture and bedding of the children, but Effie's maundering, unless George Forbes brought in Master Wardlaw. At this point in her meditations Janet was startled by the clatter of an ascending step, and before she could escape, Master Kennedy stood with his back to the house door. He took off his hat, and bowed with a deference that his words contradicted; his boots were coated with mud, though the day was fine, and his laced coat was all dragged and in disarray.

'Is Geordie Forbes within, Mistress Janet?'

'My father walked up the street since monsieur entered it; it is necessary that monsieur met him,' Janet said, coldly. She was accustomed now to this gentleman's company, and Effie was proud of it, though she concealed its occasional recurrence from George Forbes—but Janet hated it, as she hated sin.

'Ah! I missed the foot passengers, my een flew so high. So, Mistress Janet, I thought it was but a grubbing worm that weaved thus continuously.'

'Suffer that I go in, monsieur; it is cold.'

'Cold! The devil, Janet, it is as hot as an ill place. I will warm you,' and he seized Janet's hands, and strove to draw her towards him.

'I will call—I will call, let me go.'

'Cry, my bird, there's few gleds will strike up between the swallow and the hawk,' but when Janet's lips became bloodless, and she writhed like a mad creature, he unhanded her. Janet turned, and struck him in the face so smart a blow that he reeled where he stood. He laughed loudly at the chastisement; and under the influence of the merriment,

his debauched and profligate face looked what it might have done in his youth—frank and handsome.

'Certes, Janet, you strike like a pikeman. Why are you so unkind when I wish but to favour you and do you service—to take you away from this low trading town of Leith, and carry you down among the green Ayrshire hills, and show you Ailsa Craig, with the sea-mews circling round and round? You would have horses to ride and hounds to follow, and pearlins to wear, or we might cross the Channel to France, that they say you are aye greeting after, and your father would never get word of you mair.'

'You are a villain!' Janet stormed, and taking him unawares, she darted past him through the half-open door, and up to her little dark closet, where she stood, panting and sobbing, until Maillie came past with her perpetual broom.

'Oh, Marie, do not speak of it; it is nothing.'

'What's your wull, Janet? Have they left you neither cakes nor broo'?' For Effie, along with other persecutions, stinted growing Maillie to a small allowance of food, and Maillie's mind ran inevitably on victuals.

The lamp was lit; the bairns were abed—their unruly heads seen reposing on their pillows within the open leaves of the press bed; George Forbes, a decent arithmetician, was summing up accounts at the round table; Effie was squabbling with Maillie upon the boiling of the nightly herrings and potatoes; and Janet was plaiting straw into smooth and intricate plaits, occasionally resting and looking into the fire, or gazing absently at the stag and the crown carved on the old black wood above the chimney-

piece, as over the entrance. Yes, noble blood and noble bearings had once occupied this scene.

There was a tap at the door, and a 'Gude folks, how are you faring the night?' and the round, rosy face, close wig, and comfortable person of Master Wardlaw followed the salutation. George Forbes made him welcome with sufficient cordiality; and Effie, with an insatiable love of company, and a strong respect for the well-to-do in this world, was right sweet to the new comer, but did not continue quite so gracious when he sat down beside Janet, and began to examine her work, and jest with her like a cheery old wooer.

George Forbes glanced intelligently at the proceeding. Effie felt discontented and injured, for she also comprehended what brought Master Wardlaw so many evenings to their hearth, and believed that Janet would soon be independent of her authority, and the proud wife of a substantial burgess, above George Forbes in substance and in rank. Janet alone did not suspect the truth; he was to her a true *garçon*, her coquetry was spontaneous and aimless, and he had been good to her—this old man, the only person who had tried to afford her gratification since she came to Scotland.

It was a common picture on which the lamp and fire-light fell dimly—the pretty maiden and the fond old lover—but generally in such cases the maiden looks askance and coldly on the parents' suitor. It was not so here; the poor child had survived such a downfall, and possessed so few remaining pleasures in her joyless, obscure life, that Master Wardlaw was indeed the sole person on whom she smiled, and

to whom she spoke like her young self, before the dissolving of her cloud castles.

Master Wardlaw was quite in earnest in his purpose of making Janet Forbes his wife. In spite of her damaging connexion with the aristocracy, her foreign rearing, that crucifix, about which Effie Watson harped, he was convinced that she was as good and true a girl as an honest man could desire. His circumstances were so fair that he need not trouble himself about her inexperience and incapacity in housekeeping; besides, Janet was clever, and could be taught where she was ignorant, and she had her own attainments, as he was shrewd enough to see. These flexible, delicate fingers were already turned to profit, and might reap a still greater harvest. But much more, his manliness was touched by her defenceless and sad position—and truly he meant that she should be cared for and made of consequence, petted, as he termed it, till every wife in Leith should envy her. He, too, would be envied when that sparkling beauty and wit, so little known, freed from the accessories that quelled and cowed it, should be fairly transplanted to his full house and contented heart. What were disparities of years and station to such mutual benefits? Still Master Wardlaw was a cautious man, and proceeded warily, and, notwithstanding the certainty of George Forbes's consent, he was not without doubts as to the ultimate result. He had discovered that Janet was at the core lively, versatile, impetuous, and these were qualities not to be depended upon in his present pursuit.

'You have nimble fingers, Janet; are they never tired?'

'Not they; but I am so *triste*, I have never thought to be so *triste*, monsieur.'

'Do not say mounseer to me, Janet—Maister Wardlaw, as a step.'

'Maître! no, you are not mon maître, mais-ter, then, but I cannot.'

'It has made you laugh, and that itself is worth the pains.'

'I would like to please you, monsieur—maître.'

'You may, Janet, there's a hope you may—and if one wanted to please you, how could it be brought about?'

'Oh, nothing would please me—unless a letter from the *sœurs*—a view of *la belle assemblée* you told to me—a fan to stain—some purple silk to broider my violets—a lesson in your Scotch book—*une ardoise* for my little Alex—a pair of new shoes for Marie—and oh, to drink from that well of St. Antoine—to drink, and forget.'

'The drinking, Janet, may be accomplished any fine morning that you will get up with the sun, and climb Arthur's Seat while the town is asleep.'

'And that no person should plague and insult me,' Janet added, bitterly.

'Wha plagues you, Janet? Tell a friend.' But Janet, in spite of her rearing, was not disposed to try the confessional.

'Would you like a braw house, Janet, and servants—not like Maillie—but able to perform your behest, and plenty of meat, and maut, and sweet cakes?'

Janet made a grimace; the good proposed to her touched the blue scar in her poor memory.

'There is not one fine house in Scotland,' she exclaimed, haughtily.

'Janet! Away with you! The palace of Holyrood, and the Duke's at Dalkeith, and Queensberry House, and Argyle House, and scores of noble mansions. But wait a wee, my lass, would you not like grand gowns and *negligées*, a carpet and buffet, and china plates and saucers, and any bonnie thing you could devise, and peace and plenty, and honour to boot?'

'I do not know,' Janet said, turning upon him inquisitively. 'Monsieur, in Normandie, when we hear of *Robert*—that is, the devil—tempting a poor girl, it is always with a corbeille, gold and silver, bijoux and taffetas; now, I do not mean that you are the devil, but is it that you are tempting me, Maître Wardlaw, to see if I am *un paon*—a peacock, or no?'

CHAPTER VIII.

HAGAR.

JANET FORBES, I am pleased to inform you that Master Wardlaw seeks you for his wife, and I red you'll no be speered twice,' George Forbes bluntly announced to his daughter.

Thus was Janet apprised of what was in store for her, and she met the unexpected tidings in the first place with amazement. Her ideas were in confusion, influence warring with influence—there was her education of implicit submission to her father, and faith in his right to dispose of her hand in

marriage—there was her comfortless home, and her impatience of its trials, and the intolerable persecution with which Master Kennedy was ever and anon outraging her: and on the other hand, rising up to oppose her weakness, was her original nature, warm and froward, which her extreme awe of George Forbes had not annihilated—her instinctive repugnance to the union required of her, and the swift warning, which converted her former gratitude to Master Wardlaw into sudden anger and dislike—and there was Effie jeering at the match, the carle that might be a grandfather, the trade, with its homely details, its tow and its worsted, its combs, and its powder and pomatum, of which the whole flat above the shop smelled; and boasting how, when she was a young lass, a sillered daddy, like Master Wardlaw, came dangling after her, and her father scolded her and threatened to force her consent, but she seized an opportunity, and pinned her woman's cap by the long strings to her stiff and stooping wooer's blue coat neck, and despatched him, unaware of the decoration, into the busy street, and never saw his puckered face set a-courting again.

Ah! Janet's quick fancy sprang back to the noble cousin, the gallant and gentle young knight, whom she had designed to honour; and her womanliness rising up like a flood, her temper exasperated, her misery recalled in its extremity, she was ready for resistance. She dared not tell her father, but she whispered it to Master Wardlaw—she could not, she would not, she never should be his wife.

Master Wardlaw kept her counsel; he was not un-

prepared to soothe, and argue, and wait; and with much honest worth, some magnanimity and constancy, it was not impossible but that his courage and skill would at last win the victory.

But George Forbes's violent temper struck another impression on fate. He became suspicious of the delay, and the cautious approaches of Master Wardlaw; and with Effie's hints that Mistress Janet held herself above the excellent protection and provision offered her by the most esteemed of his friends, the surly spirit of the man, which contumely had ere now hardened into grim barbarity, gave the overreaching blow which Master Wardlaw was so carefully and anxiously deprecating.

One morning, when Janet descended to the family room, George Forbes put down his jug of ale, and lifting up his stern brow, arrested and kept her standing on the floor opposite his chair, unsupported by the presence of Effie, Maillie, and the children, while he brought her to a speedy decision.

'Janet, is it your intention, as it is my will, that you wed at once with Master Wardlaw?'

Janet shivered and grew cold, but roused to the encounter, she answered audibly, 'No, my father.'

George Forbes looked like a madman, if a madman can rage with brawny resolve.

'Then, mistress, this hour flit; if you can afford these whims, it shall be at your ain expense, not mine. I offer you a decent man's name and hame, or the world to work for—at your pleasure.'

'Oh Geordie, lad,' whined Effie, stealing in, 'dinna be sae hard; if Janet looks down upon the like o' us, how should she ken what it is to fecht for a

family? I'm sure it never passed my mouth that she was ane mair to feed and cleed—and corn and pease up, and the spavins to be dreaded.'

'Pack up your gear, Janet, and march, or let this be your bridal night. If he had kenned your mother, he would not have a gift of you. And, lass, it has reached my ears that young Kennedy's turning to look after you. You slut! When he has had his mind, he will cast you among the dirt as vile rubbish. My deep, deadly malediction, and that of every honest man and woman, fall upon you, and cling to you, if you listen to his tales! But I'll tell you what, my fine lady, if you will push your fortune, and earn your bread, and work for your ain hand, go —you're heartily welcome. I'll have no bairn within my doors that dares to have another mind than mine.'

Janet was mute, but she looked, as she was not wont to do, in her father's face, and the father and daughter gazed at each other for a minute in silence, with white faces and gleaming eyes, before she turned and left the room.

'Saw you ever the like of that?—no a word of lamentation, or begging pardon, or giving in. Hech! Master Wardlaw would have enough ado to keep his side of the house. She maun take sair after the grand lady her mother,' exclaimed Effie, lifting up her hands.

Janet was back again in a moment, her scarlet cloak and hood donned, and a bundle in her hand. Her eyes were sparkling, and her cheeks dyed with two crimson spots, but she spoke deliberately:—

'Adieu, my father. Adieu, madame. Adieu, my

children—and you also, Marie,' and with quick steps she left the house.

He saw her go out alone into the world. He said to himself that she would return in another mood; she would come to her senses, or she would practise her French arts for her livelihood, without galling him by her rebellion, and by the resurrection of her mother's body and spirit. No, he would not see her in the arms of Kennedy, or beneath the dark waters of the Frith. When Effie ejaculated, had he really turned her out of doors, and that she was not to blame, and how the world would speak, he swore over her hypocrisy and cowardice; he shook the child that cried 'Sister Jenny.' It was Master Wardlaw who wrung his hands and groaned, 'Geordie Forbes, are you stane or are you savage? I would gie every plack I hae to ken her safe, though I never saw her face again. What na gate did she go? Who saw her last? Poor lass! poor, ill-advised, unhappy lass!'

Hours before that speech and subsequent search—in the breezy autumn morning, Janet walked down the Tolbooth-wynd, and round the harbour quay, until she reached some piled-up planks, and sat down, half hidden by their shadow. She had been so little abroad that she could not have found her way to any other quarter of the town, and she needed to reflect on her future, if she retained the power of reflection. What should she do? Her father had discarded her; she had no other friend—none near or sure. In the whirl of the girl's mind, submission did not present itself, but despair was not far off. She had no means to carry her back to France. With

the certificate of her mother's unfortunate marriage and the record of her own baptism, she had her jewelled buckles and necklace in a little box within her bundle, but she did not know where or how to convert these relics into money, if she were willing to return to St. Anna's, and acknowledge herself a mendicant, and supplicate to be made a second time one of the many recipients of the convent's bounty. Should she set out to her mother's lofty kindred—the Dundonalds and the Galloways—and be rejected with deeper scorn from their castle gates, and taunted with her double shame—the horse-dealer's child, and his outcast child? Should she ask the road to Edinburgh, and offer her work, and sell her gentle training to some charitable lady of quality? But how to discover one, or introduce herself, with her puzzled misconceptions of Scottish speech, her timid, blundering lips, and the experience she had already acquired of the contempt and injury with which a foreigner might be treated? And again, at every glimpse of a lace frill or a cocked hat, Janet's heart beat wildly, as if Master Kennedy's lawless hands were already upon her, and his scoffing tongue jeering at her bootless rage and fear.

She sat bowed down among the wood until she was chilled, benumbed, and stupified; and then the ghastly notion occurred to her that she might be pursued, and that her father, unable to compass his wishes, would kill her with his own hand; and so she rose and hurried forward wildly, to mingle and lose herself in the commotion of a packet-ship starting from the far end of the pier. A poor woman, a stranger like herself, wandering about with some

heather brooms for sale, addressed her in Gaelic. Janet shook her head discouragingly. One of the crew of the ship weighing anchor, hurrying to join his mates, accosted her lest she should prove a bewildered passenger, missing the ship at the very moment of sailing; and a second time Janet nodded in the negative, and made one of her quick, impressive gestures, to indicate that she was not his charge. She did not perceive that she had attracted the attention of two weather-beaten old men lying in a small boat in the wake of the larger craft—until one of them, climbing across the intervening vessel, approached her, and, without speaking, pointed to his little boat, raised his hand a second time, and indicated a small island at a little distance in the Frith, and then motioned, as if to assist her to clamber over to his comrade. A third time Janet shook her head, with a little surprise, but with no acquiescence. Her accoster only smiled, and extended his hard palm, and tapped it to show that it was empty, ere he pointed to the town; and then, again signalling towards the island, renewed his beckoning, with the same inviting expression in his earnest, open, rugged face. At the same moment there was a whistle and a shout—all eyes were directed towards them, and an impatient toss of the remaining oars in the little boat; and Janet, distracted and destitute, reduced to such straits that she dreaded only the greater danger, and was reckless of the less, and could not stay to be prudent, yielded to the uncomprehended solicitation, and before she well knew what she was about, was assisted across the deck of the ship, and swung in trepidation down its side into the little

dancing boat. Immediately her two companions, joined by several of the ship's sailors, raised their oars, struck them out in unison into the water—and she saw that they were tugging and piloting into the Frith the packet, now hoisting its sails to the wind, with its crew cheering their final farewell to their friends on shore.

At first Janet was greatly frightened as they rose and fell on the curling waves; and when she composed herself and overcame this physical panic, and began to take note of her singular position, her companions were too busy for her to address them to any purpose.

The apparent owners of the boat were men in ordinary sailors' jackets and glazed caps. The one who had addressed her looked the elder, and although his hands were sinewy and he rowed vigorously, his figure was bent and his face covered with wrinkles—a visage dried, discoloured, and gnarled with age, but with something true on the furrowed brow, and mild in the white-lashed eye. His comrade bore a resemblance to him, but was abler bodied, prompter, and rougher looking, and turned his quid of tobacco, and talked at intervals to the others. Janet marvelled and hesitated, and prepared, as far as her impeded speech would allow her, to come to an explanation—when suddenly, she found the boat brought to a stop, the sailors re-ascending the ship's side, the rope loosened, the ship and boat parting company, the good ship tacking away before the wind, and the little boat left with her and its owners, a speck on the wide sea.

Janet sat still again, to mark what would follow

next. The elder man jerked his thumb once more towards the low island to which he had originally referred her, clapped his hand lightly on Janet's shoulder, looked intelligently at his companion, who laid down his oars and took the tiller, and nodded to him as Janet had done, but in assent to his suggestion—and in place of returning to Leith they were steering evidently out into the Frith, in the direction of the green island. Were they foreigners, like herself? No, she had heard one of them converse in the dialect of the country, and she was capable of distinguishing the unmistakable Scottish lineaments of both countenances before her. What did they want with her? She glanced apprehensively at her companions; but amidst her doubts she felt irresistibly drawn to trust her guides.

'To what place, and what for, do you take me?' she asked at last, with a tremulous voice. The men paused, and looked first at her, and then at each other—the one blankly, and the other with a short laugh.

'So, you are not a dumbie, mistress, you are not deaf and dumb?'

'*Dieu soit loué,* no. Why do you think so? No, I am a French girl that was come to Scotland to find my relations, and they have failed me—that is all.'

'He thought you were a dumbie connected with some show (his head is aye running upon dumbies), and that you might be glad of a night's quarters.'

'Is he mute—deaf and dumb?'

'Na, but he has a dumb dochter, and her mother's gone. Well, mistress, shall we row you back to Leith?'

'Where do you go?'

'Hame to Inchkeith, to keep the beacon fire. Well now, but if you are a stranger,' added the sailor, thinking for a moment, and speaking with good will, as if he owed her something for the blunder to which she had lent herself, 'maybe you would be glad of a night's free lodgings, although it's not on shore.'

'Thank you. *Plait-il*, is it in this small boat?'

'No, it's on the island, and a bien, bit house, and poor Kirsten for womanfolk to bear you company. See, Murdoch's signing to you to come with us, if you are not feared for being storm-staid.'

'Pardon? Is there a charge?'

'Hout, nae charges after Murdoch's haver. You'll come? That's right.'

So they bent again to the oars, and Janet rode over the waters until the green acres, dotted with sheep—with no pillared lighthouse then—but a great red fire, in the daylight burning low, was close at hand. There was no jetty or road, only a rough landing-place, where a young girl stood in the solitude, shading her eyes and watching their progress.

She was very slim and fair, and might have been a bonnie lass had it not been for the keenness of a wild bird, or a Red Indian, and the restlessness of a child in her movements and expression. This was not the sword-wasted scabbard of an active intellect, but an imprisoned spirit beating its wings for outlet. Her petticoat and short gown were of the brightest hues of blue and buff; she had a gay red handkerchief knotted round her throat; but above the whole, to protect her from the cold sea blast, was

buttoned a seaman's jacket. She was fluttering on the very water's edge, staring at Janet, and appealing with her eager eyes to Janet's conductors.

Her father started up as they neared the rocks, and sprang on shore, and smoothed her hair, and pointing to herself and to Janet, took her hand, patted it, and held it out to the newcomer. She laboured to read his meaning with her working features, and shining eyes, stamping with her foot at her own impotency. At last she clapped her hands, and flung them up into the air, and skipped, and threw her arms round the old man's neck, nestling her head for a second on his breast;—up again and away to Janet, pulling at her to land, holding by her gown, and seeking to drag her along, while her father's brown face lit up with its pensive smile as he followed his daughter, and again patted her softly on the arm—a touch which she sometimes flung off wilfully, sometimes overlooked, sometimes returned with a sudden hug—next nodding encouragement to Janet as they scrambled along.

The moment they had reached the island, the old man resigned the care and trouble of mooring the boat and looking after its lines and stores, without comment or excuse to his neighbour. Here was his true vocation—whose object, when present, superseded every other.

After climbing a steep ascent, traversing some hundred yards, passing through the flock of sheep, that raised their heads and looked at them as they passed, the young dumb girl laughing and driving them about with her hands, and nodding to them as particular acquaintances, they approached the great

black pile, with its fiery crest glowing like a huge carbuncle, and in its lea a rude strong hut, built of sea stones and fragments of ancient masonry, and thatched with layer upon layer of bent grass. It was surrounded by a garden fenced with brown seasoned wood, rounded into ribs, showing many a pitch-lined seam and jingling rusty nail.

The interior was furnished with a great sea-chest for a table, a ship's locker, a lantern, a stool or two, a pair of hammocks, a fire on the hearth, a curtain partitioning off a small inner room containing a bed. Everything was delicately clean and white, as Janet had known the cells of St. Anna, and the good Dutch ship *Jacqueline*. On a shelf, among some homely crockery, arranged elaborately in bizarre designs, were shells—scallop-shells, the cases of the sea-urchin, little cowries, with sea-fowls' eggs, and wiry-like skeletons of sea-birds—and to these poor Kirsten drew Janet, and pointed to them one by one with delight, while Murdoch Herries, the guard of the beacon, brought out bread and meat, ale and brandy, and pressed the stranger to partake of his hospitality.

'They have not yet daunted ye with their silence and their signs?' asked Murdoch's brother, Andrew, as he came in. 'I've nae mind to claver mysell, but I think, if I live muckle langer wi' them twa, I'll suner skirl like a sea maw than speak like a mortal —for Murdoch, he's tended Kirsten till he's maist lost his ain tongue and hearing; and if I were not with him to guide him, he could no more drive a bargain and make his living than Kirsten's sell. We sleepit in the same cradle, Murdoch and me, and

served our time together before the mast; and Murdoch's pleased with his post here, for there's naebody to come between him and Kirsten, and nae bairns to boast her.'

So inflexible was the old man's face under his kinsman's commentary, that it did seem that his faculties were impaired. In his strong love he had grown indifferent to them, and while yet among his fellow-men, had suffered them to fall into disuse and oblivion. Janet gazed at the pair reverently and not without fear. A little afterwards she drew her hood over her head, and wrung her hands and sobbed—poor orphan!—until Kirsten peered into her face, and raised such a pantomime of pity for Janet's distress, and indignation at her father and uncle, that Janet hastily dried her eyes and smiled upon her zealous partisan, and ate to please her, and inspected this and that trifle at her instigation, until, wearied of her new toy, Kirsten left her to herself, and dropped asleep, basking in the heat of the hearth, her head against her father's knee.

Dark night came on; the tide was in, soughing and splashing around them. Andrew Herries went out and in, attending to the beacon fire that was now blazing in the darkness, and flinging a furnace glare around the little hut and up into the cloudy sky, or sat mending his nets or baiting his lines, whistling to himself or flinging a word to Janet, but, as he had said, too long accustomed to silence to tire of his own thoughts, or to indulge in much unnecessary conversation. Murdoch Herries occupied one side of the fire, resting when his daughter slept, aiding and abetting her when she was awake, and wander-

ing from fancy to fancy—ever watching her, never weary of his life-long charge, seeking no other diversion or indulgence after his day's toil than communion with a stunted and crippled understanding.

Opposite was Janet Forbes, alone in her wit and comeliness, palpitating in the singular nest into which she had chanced to fly—hugging her selfish desolation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WANDERER.

JANET abode weeks in her near but sure and unsuspected asylum; Master Wardlaw or wild Quentin Kennedy would as soon have sought her at Jericho. She was made free to stay by Murdoch Herries and his brother, who asked her no questions, and never grudged her a share of their frugal meals; by Kirsten she was alternately patronized and neglected; and the lone green island was to her a charmed spot after the murky and riotous Tolbooth-wynd. True, she had not known when she mounted to the ruined wall and gazed curiously at its massive fragments, that here French bugles had blown, and French lances been at rest; but Janet liked to see Kirsten feed the troops of grey rabbits that frisked with her and ate out of her hands, although she screamed to behold a detachment of bearded Norwegian rats copy their example: also Janet trode on Kirsten's footsteps, and held her hand, and re-

sponded, with a few craven misgivings, to her exulting invitation to gaze down fathoms deep into the beautiful sea gardens—there might be mermaidens among these bowers of the sea, these chesnuts and purple beeches, but they were wondrously clear, cool, and fair, and in the small pools and crevices there were lustrous, gorgeous, magic flowers which shrank at Kirsten's stealthiest touch, as certainly endowed with sentient life as the little, lively fishes.

Janet helped Kirsten in the household duties for which the girl had strength and ability, and in whose performance she could be trusted; she remained alone with Kirsten when her father and uncle were out piloting vessels in the Frith or fishing for their daily bread—at first with trepidation, afterwards with only kindliness and commiseration for the poor, harmless, untaught being, unconscious in her infirmity. The girls together fed the beacon fire and gazed into its glowing caverns; they put the little finishing touches to the interior of the hut, whose spotlessness was Andrew Herries' pride, and undertook the simple cooking. In the evening, although they had the men's company, it was always so still that they might distinguish the ripple of each wave when the tide was at its extreme ebb, or the beating of their own hearts—save when the Dutch clock struck the hour, or Andrew Herries crossed the floor, or Kirsten pushed aside the table, or struck it with her clenched hand when her father failed in their cipher.

In return for her shelter, Janet took her huswife from her bundle, and deftly mended tears in the

clothes which she had seen Andrew Herries wash in a natural cistern on the craggy island, and dry on the sun-bleached rocks. Kirsten witnessed the darning with wonder and applause, and she even learnt in wonderfully few lessons to wield the little weapon, and, when the fit was upon her, to solace her intervals of quiet with its feats much like her more gifted sister—until the grown child, who would be child-like, with a little child's sacred mantle on her shoulders, when her locks were grey and her pulses low, grew proud of her performance, exulted in its prodigies, recurred to them again and again, and was benefited by the simple sedative.

For this Pallas-like boon, old Murdoch Herries blessed Janet: and when she at last hungered for the mainland, with its human stir, its trials and dangers, he helped to row her right across the Frith to the coast of Fife, and parted from her with a hoarse word of cheer.

In her velvet gown, with her scarlet cloak and her hair rolled back, carrying her bundle, now her sole earthly possession, Janet commenced her pilgrimage on foot, from house to house—repeating the true tale she had told to the Herries, of the kindred she had missed—and begging for work, lace to mend for my lady, or my lord, or my little master, silk to embroider for the daughters, caps and topknots to make up for the maids.

Surely Providence protected Janet, for no dire evil befel her—she was hungry, and weary, and foot-sore, she was suspected, and taunted, and driven away, she slept in barns, she partook of poor men's fare, she skulked from the watch-dog and the

lacquey, but men gave her bread, and shelter for her defenceless head. People marvelled at Janet's youth and her beauty, and assailed her with coarse pity or coarser railing, but they raised no hand against her, and she passed scathless through the country, till the crescent hunter's moon was high in the sky above her head.

> Oh! Scot so true in bonnet blue,
> That fear and falsehood never knew,

verily thou canst be churlish and fierce in many a word and deed, yet was ever such a tale told of other countrymen than thine?

Occasionally, but at considerable intervals and for brief spaces, Janet got employment in the country-houses of Fife, and was tasked by a thrifty, ambitious matron, or a bold, shrewish, jealous housekeeper.

Once Janet arrived at a white-turreted house on a hill, commanding a wide prospect of the sweeping Frith, and more than one parish spire—a terraced garden behind, and in front coach-houses and offices forming the universal square, entered by a pillared gateway—square sack-like pillars with bullet heads. A passer-by informed Janet that its owners had not emerged from one of the blasts of adversity which followed the Union, and tore up or shattered many a family tree; the laird had been out with Balmerino, and although he had escaped with his head, his son was still under attainder, and the house was now rented by strangers, who proved Janet's temporary superiors.

There was a stately but benevolent grandame, in

hoop and fly lappet, who would have provided for the poor workwoman, had not her hands been tied by such scant means as few tradesmen's wives could now spend or spare. There was a girl of Janet's age, though scarce so pleasant to see, full of a young soldier kinsman who buckled her sandal, and picked up her glove, and kissed her hand; to whom she gave posies of the wallflower that grew on the wall; whom she met on the springy turf and yellow sands, when he went out to shoot, or course, or row—but who rode away with a smile from under the gateway one day before Janet departed, leaving a white, still maiden in the turret-chamber 'to bleed away' her poor, proud heart.

Janet was admitted into one of the public chambers, in whose window was fixed another of those bunker-seats at which maltreated and implacable Lady Lovat scouted and flouted. There Janet sat and worked, a party to many a family discussion, over which her incapable ears itched, and where her eyes could travel to the pasture where the lowing cattle were milked and the colts raced, to the ships upon that watery and ever-changing highway—and away towards green Inchkeith, where Murdoch Herries lived with his dumb daughter—even to the smoke of Leith, where Effie Watson scrambled through her housewifery in the house in the Tolbooth-wynd, where George Forbes gloomed, and Master Wardlaw came to seek what he had lost and would never find.

Again Janet quitted the 'white house by the sea,' wound up a long dusty road, towards a wooded crag and another mansion, but in humbly seeking a back

entrance, she lost her way and entered a den like the Dean, only three times the size, and with a broader and deeper brook flashing and sparkling through and through. Janet sat down, not like Pilgrim, to read her roll or to repose on the moss, but to bathe her feet and re-arrange as she best might her apparel—when she was aroused by a family band of many children bursting into the hollow for their play, to seek nuts now ripening on the hazel bushes, or to pluck black brambles, to hunt bees, or to wade in the stream and chase the agile minnows.

There were many boys, sturdy or bright, grave or truant, some who bore lightly as men the responsibilities of arduous service under the scorching sun of India—and two girls, one very lovely in her lily skin and her loving 'pining' eyes, but the other, the chief of the whole little family, a thin, sallow, ardent creature, with scheming but ingenuous brow, pliant lip, and fearless indefatigable foot. The little girls wore their hair thrown back, in the fashion of Janet Forbes's, and their attire was still more fantastic and wobegone—those 'blue lutestrings with silver flowers,' and tucked up gauze side skirts, all draggled here, and stained there, and tumbled and faded, like juvenile strolling players drummed through some barony and ducked in a pool, as a concluding penalty. They were inclined to fly at the sight of Janet, as at a nymph or Brownie, but when rallied by the bigger girl, they made a circle round her, and pressed upon her, and gazed at her, till their captain dispersed them authoritatively to their games, and took possession of Janet as her peculiar spoil and prey.

'And what kind of friends did she seek—and

where were they gone—and whom had she left in France—and was it a bonnie place—and had she seen the King and Queen, and the Chevalier, she kenned wha—and had she a silken doggie—and did she ever read an auld book named *Froissart*—and had she been told that a runaway lady was once married by a priest in this very den?'

While Janet was replying to this accumulation of desultory questions, two ladies appeared in sight, walking down the narrow path together, and disputing in loud accents. The moment they issued from the trees, the rest of the children scampered off, crying, 'Anne, sister Anne, the ladies are coming!' and indeed no sooner had the couple caught a glimpse of Janet and her companion—who stood her ground dourly, than they assailed them on separate counts. They were two singular-looking women, though perfectly dissimilar—such as would now cause the languid world to stare. They were both masculine in voice and manner, though unlike in height, dress, features, and fortunes. The one was a long, gaunt woman in a spencer and man's hat, and with a harsh physiognomy, who strode, and spat, and cracked a riding-whip, and shouted, 'Hey, Lady Anne, dawdling your play-hour! Come, and I'll give you a ride on my Parson, or ever your Dominie opens his een to swallow his black pudding:

> Oh! first they eatet the white puddings,
> And syne they eatet the black, O!'

and rehearsing the satirical ditty at the full pitch of her stentorian voice, she bore off her reluctant little vassal.

The other intruder was a rotund figure in a muslin gown, stomacher and kerchief complete, with a red-and-white rose complexion, and a couple of most saucy, rebellious eyes; she was a matron—her fellow a maid; they contemned and hated each other with cordial detestation.

'What gipsy have you picked up the day, my Lady Anne Lindesay? If the Countess does not shorten your tether, you'll not be the wife for my son that I spoke of, "the decent lass with the penny," and questionless you think yourself too high a dame for the like of him! And now, my cummer, since the coast is clear, you are not of this pairt, that's plain, nor London bred. Are you from Germany, or Spain, or the Pope's dominions? Though you have not a ragged ruffian of a man or a tambourine, do you spae fortunes or dance?'

'I'm French, my lady, and I work lace,' replied Janet, submissively.

'Ye'll no be muckle worth, or you would not travel the country. For shame, you jade, and you so young! But first, on your soul, did you ever, in Paris, or in Bordeaux, or Strasburgh, or Rome, or on the seas, come across a daidlin man taking pictures and inking stane?' She paused but to fetch a breath, then burst out into an irresistible anathema and appeal—'Devil take you, Rabbie Strang! for your carving and graving, and your idols of canvas and marble, will you forsake your faithful wife and your housefull of sma' bairns? If it was not Soph Johnstone that swore it, I would believe there's ne'er a man left in creation. No? Well, there's your plack, go away with you and mend your

light life. Work, said you, lass? I'm like enough to want work myself, and who would fash themselves with foreign finery like you?' and snapping her fingers with great fire and disdain, the aggrieved and deserted wife, whom the great engraver admired so much, and dwelt with so seldom, rolled back as she came, leaving Janet once more sole tenant of the leafy solitude.

Another week, and Janet's great courage began to fail; the snell October wind made the poor French girl shiver; her cheek was hollow under her hood; and as she attained no prospect of a sure maintenance, but was forced to continue her tramper's life, dread visions haunted her of the winter's storms, and biting frosts—and of wanderers like herself perishing of cold, hunger, and weariness, in blasts of wind and rain, or in snow drifts, on some of those wild moors she had already crossed.

Janet had walked all day drowsily, with but one application to a beadle and gravedigger who abode hard by a little grey church and steeple, and who banned her as a mass-monger. She was approaching a low-built, unpretending farmhouse, double guarded by its new stacks, with its roses bearing many a scarlet hip for the little birds, and the fire in the wide kitchen-chimney reflected ruddily on its small, thick window panes. The blithe bustle of the ingathering was still in the yard, the loaded wains were yet creaking and labouring along, the last stack was building, men were working heartily as seeing the good completion of their toils, a colony of dogs looked wistfully on their exertions, and a cloud of fowls delayed to roost that they might pick up the

rich store of scattered grain. A pale, fair, sweet-faced young woman was placidly regarding the home triumph, and waiting on a stalwart fellow, who, receiving a can from her hands, took a grateful draught of its contents, and handed it smiling to his companions. A loaded cart passed near, its overhanging sheaves grazing the woman—but he threw out his strong arm and sheltered her, and just then a few drops of hail fell, and a gust tossed abroad a shower of withered leaves from the trees that clothed the sides of the now bare and rugged den close at hand, and the eye, smarting with cold, turning to decide the course of the storm, met two hill summits already powdered white with snow.

Janet took in the little picture with a dull mechanical stare, as different as possible from the merry glance which had shot out behind the grille at Rouen, and even crazed Master Wardlaw.

'What's your will, lass?' inquired a soft voice. 'Come in and scoug the shower,' and Janet entered the wicket, walked up the little garden path, and crossed the threshold of the Dean.

CHAPTER X.

THE COVERT.

AMONG the abundance and homeliness, and purpose-like throng of the Dean kitchen, sat a sick elderly woman, with the same sweet mouth and clear eyes, but, in spite of years and ailments, with more quickness, buoyancy, and earthly concern in her

air and movements, as if the stream of time had not stranded her on its shores, but had surely borne her on in a full, rich course, whose wealth would not be exhausted until it emptied itself into the broad ocean. They seated Janet on the settle by the fire; they warmed her wet and weary feet; they fed her with elder-flower wine and sweet milk and soft bannocks, and golden honey from their hives; and when the weather lowered more and more, they bade her go no farther, but rest with them within biggit walls till the piercing gale and the dark night wore past together. Janet looked with warm, tearful glances into the kind faces; and refreshed and strengthened, she began to display her little gifts, and pray that she might be permitted to execute that night, some little piece of work in her hostess's behalf. Much the farmer's wife and daughter and the servant lasses wondered at and praised those spider webs and that picturesque tracery—those vine leaves and that orange tree and squirrel, all stitched by those cunning fingers; and, what they valued still more, those elaborate exploits of darning—the diaper darn, the twill darn, the loop darn.

The whole household drew together—the wise, courteous father, the grave, strong son. Simon Lauder could not speak French, but he questioned Janet curiously, in his own tongue, of foreign fashions and monkish missals, and the service chanted by stoled priests before glittering altars—and Janet clasped her hands and sung to him one of her canticles, her young voice rising and falling and swelling in lofty melody, while John Lauder listened in stupid stolidity and some impatience of his father's learning. But

as the majestic yet familiar words trembled on Janet's lip, a tide of associations swept away the frost of her self-control, and she broke down in sobs and tears such as she had shed when she first saw Murdoch Herries and his daughter in the beacon hut, on the lonely isle of Inchkeith. And her sorrow and her shame did not now exhaust themselves in inarticulate moaning: in instinctive appreciation of their powers of faith and sympathy, she frankly offered them her confidence—her tale of cruel wrong—that she was the lawful daughter of a lady of high degree, Susanna, Countess of Strathmore; that her father bore her no love, and brought her home, in her ignorance, to a squalid home and a jealous step-dame—and that, when she opposed their will, they turned her adrift on the hard world.

Poor lass!—poor, little-thought-of, evilly-entreated lass! How these true hearts melted at her story! Then followed their impulses, without pausing to doubt, censure, or condemn—without turning away in their indifference, egotism, and superiority—still, in their most generous impulses, 'like noble boys at play,' unafflicted with self-consciousness, never delaying in order to probe their own diseased hearts and brains, and feel nervously their own fevered or languid pulses, but only sensible that there was an unfair act and an oppressed sufferer, and eager to make the wrong right, and to assuage the misery, if they could not punish the offender.

'Mother,' entreated Anne Lauder, in a private conference next day, 'if we could keep this poor lass at the Dean till the winter is away, she would mark and mend the cloth, and lay in a stock of lace and

mittens and scarfs for herself to sell in the summer —and she would speak with my father at night, and sleep wi' me. I never had a sister, and I've many a time wished for a neighbour. Oh dear! to be a stranger in a strange land!' and Anne's low voice quivered in its earnestness.

'It would be fine if we could, Annie,' Mrs. Lauder meditated, but Simon Lauder decided the question.

'*Faber quisque suæ fortunæ*,' he owned, 'but I doubt not Claudius, in the thick of his censorship, never likened a lass to sic an undertaking. Fortune and friends have frowned on this bairn—the last even against nature—the mair need that we do our best to supply the deficiency. Such as we have, give unto her. The poor lass need never fear want and trouble, and worse, God help her! when there are stout men-folk to fend for her, and women to bind up her wounds, and take her up beside them on their asses' backs. I guess many a good cuddy has borne a double burden, and ne'er broken down when all was done.'

There was but one dissentient voice to the boon, and it came from an unexpected quarter.

'Is it true, Anne?' asked John Lauder, uneasily, as he swung his flail. 'Does my father really mean this lady-born, French lass to sit at our fireside and board with us for months—or the rest of her days?'

'John!' exclaimed Anne in indignation, 'John, are you fey?' And John hurried off, with a flush of shame and vexation overspreading his face.

In happy unconsciousness of any hostile eye or ear,

Janet accepted the proffered unconditional protection as guilelessly as it was given, with tears and prayers and great joy,

It was wonderful how soon the strange girl domesticated herself in the farm-house. In a very few weeks at the Dean she learnt more Scotch and dropped more idioms than she had done in months in Leith. She locked up her little crucifix, and prayed with closed eyes in spirit and in truth. She assumed Anne's dress—the short gown and the dark bright petticoat; but her hair would never bind like Anne's—it curled back from her square forehead, and left all free the contour of the face and the slender throat. Janet was no longer a listless or sullen spectator of the household engagements around her; the chord had been struck to which every faculty responded; she was as busy as a bee, and the pride of the Dean—for when did untutored lass so make up for lost time, and penetrate into the whole arcana of female knowledge—churning, cheese-making, bread-baking, brewing, spinning? And with all these difficult acquirements there mingled her pretty accomplishments—her matelotes, her omelettes, her soufflées, her bouquets, her cauchoise, her tabouret—her foreign strangeness and freshness—her Twelfth-Night games, her Easter eggs, her child's bonbons.

Janet would nurse Mrs. Lauder, and she would summon John to dinner; she would spin with Anne; she would play at 'fox and goose' with Simon when his head ached and his eyes were too dim for his book; nay, she was eyes to him, she would read to him, like Milton's daughters, but full of complacency, those words and lines which, unless in her chants,

were no more to her than the dashing of a majestic surf on a distant and unknown shore. Saunders' cross wife scolded her least of all; the hagman and the little herd did her bidding as if she were the born mistress of the Dean, and not its dependent waif, here to-day and away to-morrow.

Simon Lauder's superior nurture, his wife's ill-health, Anne's misfortune, had removed them from their neighbours; but these came now to inspect, criticise, and patronize the stranger—and the Dean had once more its genial rustic company, whose varied voices, varied tastes, and varied trials united to train the heart to tenderness and forbearance, to make it mellow and ripe, to teach it that 'it is not good for man to be alone.'

When the spring was ushered in with its fleeting sunshine, and sharp whistling gales, Janet Forbes experienced a new existence. To gather the first wild hyacinth—to climb as far as she could among these misty Lomonds, where the snow lingered in patches, and gaze fondly on each dwelling—to find she was able to name each wood where the buds were swelling, each hamlet, each hut with the tiny feather of smoke from its humble chimney—to trace the way she had come that dark October night, and linger over each point of her solitary route.

Every fine afternoon, when John Lauder returned from his fields, Janet Forbes was amissing, had strayed in a new direction, and was losing herself in a fresh delight—the young lambs gambolling by their mothers, the crows plucking the hair from the heifers' backs to line their high nests, the bright sunshine and spring rains on the newly turned-up

land, on the winter wheat and fine-spiked grass that drank it gratefully, and sprouted obedient to its bidding. If Anne was not with her—and the country was a common sight to Anne, who was best pleased with her home cares, and never cared to stray beyond the garden and the cheerful yard—John Lauder had to seek Janet in the den or on the hills, until even his mother said complainingly, that it was hard upon him, after his day's labour, and that Janet, who was a sensible lass in other things, should learn 'to take her foot in her hand, and hie hame at better hours.' But John Lauder never shunned the duty, never failed to track the delinquent. He went after her as a shepherd would seek his ewe lamb; and he brought her back over moss and stones as carefully and quietly.

Janet Forbes was not like the young Lauders; she had much imagination, and she had received just sufficient information to make her greedy for more: she conquered her slowness and difficulty in reading English long after she could speak it fluently, and set herself to study an old-fashioned edition of Shakspeare amongst Simon Lauder's stores.

Not Mrs. Lauder alone, but Simon, held play-going—to which they were about as much tempted as to gladiator shows, tournaments, and bear-baitings—in Presbyterian reprobation, but they had toleration for play-books. Simon appreciated well 'immortal Will,' and cured by the antidote of his great wholesome genius, many a twinge of rheumatic pain caught in the newly cultivated land, and the damp ditches of the Dean farm. Mrs. Lauder lived in the innocent conviction that much harm could not lie

between the boards of a book, especially when there existed such good books as the blessed *Bible*, and Rutherford's *Letters*, and Haliburton's *Sermons*, to which one might turn when one was met and assailed by 'a printed lee.'

As the bold Lomonds, bold to a Southern, and the little secluded den, and each tiny perfect leaf and flower and dim floating fleecy cloud were to Janet's bodily vision, so was Shakspeare to her mental regard—a field of marvels and of joys, a copious library she could never exhaust. She piqued John Lauder into reading in his turn—burning over *Othello*, and shivering over *Hamlet*—his intellectual nature shooting out under such strong food until he began to wince and writhe at his brain's small stature and unfurnished recesses, and to cast off the slough that had encompassed and bound him.

'Be ye hospitable to strangers, for some have entertained angels unawares.' For John Lauder, he believed that this young French girl to whom they had afforded shelter was like a rosy, fragrant wild briar twined among their own pale honeysuckle of the Dean.

CHAPTER XI.

JOHN LAUDER AND HIS LOVE.

JANET sang 'Huntingtower;' she learnt it from the servant lasses, and she liked the sentiment and the romance, and would go lilting it up and down the house, the garden, and the yard—not the less so that John Lauder hated the song,—

Huntingtower and Blairnigower,
A' that's mine is thine, Jeannie.

John Lauder gave Jean, the lass, a knot of ribands to substitute 'Lord Spynie' as an accompaniment to her wheel:—

Lord Spynie, ye may pu' the rose,
And spare the lily flower,
When ye gae through the garden green,
To woo in lady's bower.

And ye may pu' the lightsome thyme,
And leave the lonesome rue;
For long and sair will the lady mourn,
That ye gae there to woo.

But Janet discovered the bribery, and plagued him for it, refusing to speak to him, hiding his book, purloining his mittens and his whip. She had a habit of saying to him when he offended her, with great spirit and a strong shade of waggery, '*Passe*, I am Lady Strathmore's daughter,' and many an humble attention and many a rude retaliation the phrase saved her. Perhaps the ready use of the shield proved that its Gorgon's head was gone, or that the wreathing snakes that had once so coiled round and shot their forked tongues into Janet's heart, were charmed of their sting and become harmless tresses. But John Lauder was not quick enough to arrive at this conclusion.

It was already sheep-shearing, and the men and boys of the Dean were gathered by the little stream with the flock in the fold on its banks. Since early morning, the Herculeses of the farm had been up to the knees in water, plunging in the struggling sheep; and the women were standing by, admiring, as

women admire, powerful mould and feats of strength, whether in war or peace; and there was the murmur of activity and glee that attends country folk's epochs, and lends to each something of a festival strain—and yet not that alone, but also a hymn of thankfulness for the multiplied flock, the snowy wool that shall protect from the winter's cold, rich and poor alike—the true golden fleece.

Janet was chattering to Anne Lauder of the scene before them, of the *Agnus Dei* of his Holiness the Pope—and above all of this June time—that there was *aubépine* in the den, such bunches of almond-scented *aubépine*, fragrant for twenty yards around, and each bud purer than the uncarded wool. Janet would take Anne to the old thorn tree, and would pull its treasures for her, but Anne said, 'Na, na, keep them for John.' Father and mother, friend and servant, bade Janet Forbes give her best to John Lauder, and come and rule over them. They loved John Lauder, they loved the young girl they had saved and served, and recognising that the happiness of the two lay in each other, in their single-heartedness, they never dreamt of any other alternative but bringing them together as soon, and as indissolubly as possible.

When John came down the den all flushed and dripping, Janet once again in imagination unrolled the broad lands with which she was to have endowed another, and the noble youth who was to have gained them, and turned her back, and emptied her apron into the stream, and could have cried to see the pearly clusters in their dark green setting, the brides in the arms of their sombre bridegrooms,

floating fast down the water. But when John Lauder asked what she meant, she averred she had sent the bonnie flowers on an errand to Strathmore; and when he hastily fished them out, drenched and soiled, she laughed at him for appropriating what she had rejected—until he demanded, in soreness, when she should ride in state to her castle of Glammis, and if she would hire him for her ploughman or her gardener, and grant him his penny fee. And angry words, far removed from the blue sky and the tinkling water and the midges dancing on its surface, and the bee humming by, passed between the pair; and they parted with pangs in their hearts, which rankled there after many days, especially in the bosom of poor foolish Janet, who moped alone during the long summer mornings and evenings, and persuaded herself that she really meant to quit the Dean and its true and dear friends whom she was trying to alienate, and to wander once more into the bleak world—and proceeded to drop inadvertent hints of her design until John Lauder's blood ran cold, and he would have put his neck beneath her feet, ay, and well nigh given his life, to deprive her of her cruel revenge.

Thus they rung their changes, and yet on retrospect that summer at the Dean never seemed harassing or vexatious, but one long summer's day, sunny in the morning, hot and thundering at noon, bright and tranquil at its close.

The harvest sickles were whetted once more, the dew was glittering on the yellow barley, and the myrtle-leafed forget-me-not was floating on the ditches, and Janet of Strathmore shore among the

line of reapers—but John Lauder, the master's son, bound behind her; and many a merry lad and lass smiled or blushed as they passed the couple, many a gossip would fix the day when the pistols should be fired and the bride's-bread broken for the young gudewife of the Dean, who had been courted and would be wedded within its mossy walls.

One harvest sunset John Lauder went down the glen with some other young men to mark a fox's earth, whose tenant was already descending on the unwary herd and straggling poultry. Mrs. Lauder was in bed in the room within; Anne had gone with the servant lasses and their array of pails and lanterns to the milking; Simon Lauder was presiding at the horse suppering; and Janet sat alone in the dusk of the window and the glow from the fire, not caring to draw out her thread in the obscurity, but resting her hand on the rock and bending her head in thought. John Lauder came in, with an uncertain step and a pale face; he had missed his footing half way up the bank, and fallen from its height into the den below—but the branches had broken the descent and he was not hurt, and did not wish to frighten his family by the whole party's formal return. He sat down, and covered his face with his hand to steady his dizzy nerves, or to shut out the sight of Janet, white like himself, and trembling and looking at him wistfully. She watched him in silence, and then she got up and came to him; she lifted off his bonnet, and brought water and stood at his knee, his humble handmaid—he suffered it a little while and then he started up.

'Forgive me, Janet, I am better, nothing ails me; I only wanted to feel sick a while longer, that you might grow kind.'

Nothing ailed him, indeed, that he should clasp Janet close and tight, and that his eyes should shine like stars, but poor Janet was taken aback, so ruefully glad that he was safe and sound, that she was not fit to punish the momentary imposition. Then was poured forth the weighty argument, 'A man's a man for a' that;' no noble or knight, 'fine' though his dress, 'soft' his word, would love Janet Forbes like John Lauder. It seems that Janet listened to the threadbare reasoning which has exercised so much eloquence—and fairly forgot the unpremeditated advantage which permitted the confession of his love, and gained him his heart's desire—perhaps because when he held her as a man holds his treasure, there returned upon Janet, distinctly and vividly, the October day at the farm gate when the houseless wanderer first viewed the peaceful, bounteous homestead of the Dean, with the same strong arm lifted up to guard Anne Lauder.

Simon Lauder discoursed of the *patria potestas*, of the child born in the master's house, growing up his heir, of the maiden adopted and admitted to the daughter's right, and wedding worthily with the son. And it was a fact that he was better satisfied with John's choosing a wife after the manly precedent of the ancients, than if he had, according to shrewd Scottish dictum, hunted out and ridden down the longest tocher in the parish.

Mrs. Lauder and Anne rummaged in great chests,

and bleached and sewed as contentedly and joyously as if for one of themselves; dependents were regaled and toasts drunk; and peradventure poor Janet Forbes was wedded as honourably and with as chivalrous regard by her yeoman husband, as if she had in truth mated with a belted Hamilton or Galloway.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CORONET AND THE BARON'S CASTLE.

JANET FORBES was the young gudewife of the Dean. No châtelaine, no baron's lady, no dame; yet, strange to say, so heedless or hardened to her destiny that her cordiality and her mirth, her wholesome happy nature, as well as her charity, still perfume the tradition of its French-bred mistress, long after the little grey Dean has crumbled into dust with prouder piles. One can well suppose how Janet was the soul of innocent amusements—kirns under the September moon, feasts when the November ox was slain, first-footings over the crisp January snow, bridals, and baptisms; how she lent to them a dash of her own *naïve* composition, until greybeards sang, and lame men danced; and how she drew into the merry-making the shy, the stupid, and the sorrowful, until all rejoiced together. In her reign, friendly plays abounded; and she was no less the light of her husband's heart, the most active worker in the morning, the reader or singer by the hearth at

night, the frank bold maintainer of her own opinion, the faithful asserter of the right and challenger of the wrong, though Simon Lauder and John were the offenders—for mortal men will err to the end of time.

The lamp that lit extreme old age when it descended in its mists on the Dean; the bright side of Anne, ever meeker and milder; the loving mother of loving children; and if those had been the Catholic days of Scotland they might have canonized our Janet, so did her faith and piety progress and perfect themselves, so good was she to her people—and a farmer's wife has people as well as her liege lord and lady—so mindful of the poor, so unshrinking in personally relieving their most miserable wants. Ah! the old beggar and porter phrase was as untrue of Janet, as that most detestable of statements which refers to heroes and valets. Why, the very dogs about the Dean would forsake John Lauder to walk at Janet's heels, and rest their heads on Janet's lap.

Under Simon Lauder's mediation there was in process of years a surly warrant of pardon or neutrality obtained from George Forbes, but he would not consent to see Janet, nor did the father and daughter ever meet again in this world.

Like Flora Macdonald, Janet gave all her stout sons to fight their country's battles by sea and shore. Born and bred on a remote farm, surrounded by images of rural quiet, they grew up with that incomprehensible, unconquerable longing for the restless waves or the ranks of war, which, in spite of many obstacles, fills our services.

To procure their midshipman's berths and ensign's commissions, accessible to the middle class when trumpets are blowing and ranks riddled and shorn, the resources of the Dean were spent; and unprosperous days ensuing, embarrassments and poverty ended the tenant's hold of its fields and uplands. But there was no great grief involved in the admission; it was not till late in the century that narrowing circumstances advanced their gripe on the little household. Simon Lauder and his brave wife had been long gathered to their fathers; Anne kept her tryst in heaven with the soldier who fell on Bunker's Hill; even John Lauder—manly, merciful John—had left her he had cherished so fondly. His goodly bodily presence was mouldering in the churchyard, and his spirit had passed in hope to his Master; and it was as a widow of threescore, and with no immediate and peculiar stay, that Janet quitted the Dean—all whom she had found there departed, only their shadowy faces and voices so real in her heart, that she could afford to lose their dwelling, where they had lived aud laboured, without one refrain of look or tone fading from her daily path.

She had been long a favoured woman; after a stormy beginning her history had been a record of virtue and happiness. What mattered it that its close was full of the stillness and the barrenness of a wan winter's sunset? Soon the stars would shine out one blaze of beauty, to which no summer's balmy fruitfulness would compare. If 'man wants but little here below,' least of all is required by the good and great nearing their Father's house. Janet

came to the Dean agonized with her cross—young, wild, desperate, with the green shoots of grace scant and feeble in her soul: the Dean gave her warm and true human friendship and love; seated her, 'clothed and in her right mind,' at the feet of Him whose unworthy servants the good and great deem themselves. And she went out, not like Naomi, empty, but full of the inexhaustible abundance of a later day—a chastened, grateful, resigned Christian woman. When she had this world's goods, she and hers dispensed them liberally. In her time she caused 'the widow's heart to sing with joy.' That was a higher, surer wealth than the possession of the 'goodly Babylonish garment and wedge of gold' for which so much is sacrificed. God grant every true heart such riches when the wayworn feet 'stumble on the dark mountains.'

Nay, Janet Forbes was not unfortunate in the close of her career.

Janet's children were honourable for respectability and worth, and in some instances for talent; but, perhaps because they were better gifted, none of them succeeded in building up fortunes, or in rising to the station from which they were, on one side of the house, descended. Some of her sons perished in early life; one was a prisoner in the hands of the national enemy for a protracted period. These were heavy troubles, but they passed away. The sons who survived her were painstaking and industrious, apt and acute, subordinate officers, no more. Her daughters married, loved, and died in honest independence and obscurity. But all these thoughtful, tried, careworn men and women counted themselves

honoured in their origin, and privileged in providing for her whose busy hands had once willingly worked for them, and whose faithful, cheery smile had been to them a ray from heaven. Not one of them, however stern, or peevish, or prosaic at times, but were once a year little children, poets, Christians, when they contrived what of their best they could force on the dear old mother, who would have been content with the crumbs from their table, and their affectionate duty.

Janet closed her life near some of her descendants, in a small house in the suburbs of the 'fair city' of Perth, infinitely above the notorious Lady Jane Douglas, who in a similar locality terminated her harassed and wretched existence.

They say before Janet's death, some incidents of her peculiar story became public; and application being made for her, without her authority or that of her children, to her noble relatives and connexions, they confirmed their common blood, admitted her claim, and settled on her such an income as increased her comfort and ease, tendering her the gracious civilities and courtesies of kindred. Janet accepted their acknowledgments with the noble simplicity and magnanimity which were natural to her; but while she declared herself ready to welcome any member of their families who should think it worth while to visit her—and perhaps she did so receive their greeting—she firmly declined to become their guest. 'She was an old woman,' she said, 'and although she had been Lady Strathmore's daughter, she was John Lauder's widow, who had not been used to lords or lairds, save on rent days, and

who would never shame castle or hall with his plain speech and bearing.

Yet Janet saw Glammis before she died. She expressed a wish to that effect—and she was very far from friendless—on the contrary, her nature was so sound, that even in widowhood, age, and infirmity, her bright intelligence and generous temper served her as at the turning point of her destiny, and won and retained for her friends, zealous and attached, among young and old, rich and poor—all with whom she came in contact. So Janet, against every drawback and obstacle, was transported to the noble castle where her mother once ruled queen. She inspected its various curiosities and splendours with much interest; looked long down the green vistas of the fine park; asked where her mother had sat, and where she had slept; inquired, in a lower tone, if any man remembered aught of George Forbes; and declared at last, in soft, solemn murmur, 'Well, it is grand—grander than I dreamt; but it is not so bonny as the Dean lang syne; not so kindly as that dark day when I first saw John Lauder building in the yard; not so sweet as in yon harvest month when we walked our lanes ilka gloaming, plighted man and wife, down among the yellow birks and brown hazels, or climbing up the hill-side, wading through the purple heather—and it is a whole heaven less fair than the Lord's country, where John and Anne, and our father and mother, and even some of the bit bairns, have gone before me.'

SQUIRE BOLTON'S TRANSGRESSION.

CHAPTER I.

SYLVIA BOLTON was advised to write extracts in order to improve her handwriting. In those days—Dr. Johnson's and Mrs. Chapone's days—penmanship was an elegant accomplishment, so Sylvia docilely provided herself with an old account-book, whose first pages contained blotted entries of farriers' recipes and day labourers' wages, and heading it in her neatest characters 'Commonplace Book,' proceeded diligently and painfully to copy out No. 344 of the *Rambler*, 'On Female Fastidiousness and Refinement;' as well as those famous lines in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 'To Miss ——, on her giving the author a gold and silk network purse of her own weaving.'

Sylvia did not make a base pretence of study by pursuing it through the medium of a flighty sentimental diary of her daily acts and aspirations, frequent as such diaries were. Had she indulged in that recreation, she must have chronicled her seams

and her syllabubs, or her last run into Northorpe to drink a dish of tea with Joan Littlepage, who lived too near for the interchange of endless letters. No; Sylvia wisely contented herself with transcribing the great and good Doctor's massiveness in the extreme of humble admiration for one of her two literary kings.

Besides, Sylvia had but fractions of time for the exercise. She filled the responsible situation of an only sister in a family of sons, with a mother—a very fine lady—affected, whimsical, self-indulgent, and prone to essences and cordials to a degree peculiar to the era.

Poor Sylvia was a species of victim. Her post was no sinecure; she was expected to undertake all the serious management of the family; she made the pies and pastry and home-brewed wine; she hemmed the cravats, stitched the shirts, manufactured the gowns, kept the keys, gave out the stores, ordered the servants, made tea, distilled her mother's mint and cinnamon waters, to which more enlivening compounds lent their pungency, was ready to fill her father's pipe or play a game at cribbage when he had exhausted his metropolitan sheet or odd volume. Withal, it is not difficult to see that her leisure for playing on the harpsichord, embroidery, and cultivating polite literature was brief.

Poor little Sylvia;—she was unpretending by nature, and she had been unconsciously put down by those well-disposed home tyrants until the little vanity and coquetry of the girl were disciplined to perfection. She was such a pretty girl, with apple-blossom cheeks, and that bronze which the Roman

ladies appreciated well, of rich auburn hair—her brothers called it red, and Sylvia accepted their definition, sighed ruefully over the gift, and secretly envied Joan Littlepage's black locks.

Sylvia had inherited one of the pretty fantastical, pastoral French shepherdess names of the period, one of those Clarissas and Phillises that alternated so oddly with the Pollies and Betties; but her household authorities remorselessly contracted it to Sylly, to Sylvia's extreme mortification, before strangers.

Sylvia Bolton was a good girl and clever, but she was encompassed by difficulties that no single woman could overcome; rallied by her father, censured by Mark, advised by Ned, ordered by Sam, and perpetually mourned over by her mother for her deficiency in widely-diffused, shifting airs and graces.

Sylvia was by no means without spirit, either; but it was such a pretty cock-sparrow spirit, united to so tender a heart and frank a temper, that the most thorough advocates for womanly meekness would have consented to bear it.

Would that you could have seen Sylvia seated at the end of the heavy table, glancing up from her self-imposed occupation to run over certain clamorous considerations,—whether she had not better run out and look after her bantam chickens—whether the hot cake would be out of the oven—whether, oh! whether her father would take her into the town one evening this week, and whether the play would be that terrible story, *The Fatal Marriage*, or the charming rattle, *The Busy Body*, and whether Mrs.

Daventry would come in with her pink satin sacque or her gauze *negligée*.

We have lost such faces—so youthful, so simple, so fresh, so bright. We have thoughtful brows, clear eyes, sweet mouths, the glory of beauty still; but what was guilelessness then, and true sentiment, and rustic archness, would be ignorance, affectation, rudeness now. Our roses were more wild roses then; our posies culled from rutted lane, grassy hedgerow, lonely hill-side. We have lost the Clarissa Harlowes, the Olivia Primroses, the Dolly Vardens, the Lady Graces; their very attire is gone —the open skirt, the rich petticoat, the quaint kerchief, the provoking top-knot perched above the rolled back, clustering, rippling hair, the winged lace cap, worn for an easy distance out of doors, the coquettish apron, the long gloves.

Would that you could see the Gate-house, the Walnut Parlour, and each of its inmates, for one and all were full of yesterday. The high weather-worn mansion, built in the days when Market-Northorpe Gate was more than a name; the tall wind-defying chimneys; the porch, with its seat; the terraced garden, where abundance of pot-herbs grew as well as flowers; the stone steps; the dial; the bower where Sylvia read her letters and sang her songs, 'Oh! Nanny, wilt thou go with me?' 'My face is my fortune;' and 'A nutting we will go;' the square tower of Market Northorpe; the red brick chimneys and the woods of Hathaway Hall; the meadows, with their English timber and their precious burden of grain; the trout stream, where the clouds cast their shadow, the willows

dipped, and the ragged Robin—a gipsy Narcissus—fluttered over his image in the water; the sunny sandy hill with its larches, its furze, its blue bells, and its burrowing rabbits, round which the high road disappeared.

In the Gate-house parlour, with its cross-beams, its small deeply-sunk windows, its wainscot breast high, the old English family were gathered. Very homely and clumsy for the most part, but made for use, and to outlast generations, were their household gods—their buffet or cupboard, their Dutch clock, their huge leathern-covered chairs. Like flickers of sunshine among them showed the sweet pot with the May or the gillyflower, and Sylvia's fan and her sampler on the wall opposite the dark picture of the Bolton of Anne's reign, in hat and feather and flowing wig, whose sword hung above the door. Sylvia's satin piece was in the best parlour, along with the blue settees, the stained wood tea-caddy, and the Chinese screen. But it is with the Walnut Parlour that we have to do, for the Blue Room, its superior, was used only on merry-makings and ceremonious occasions, and those, on account of Squire Bolton's indolence and Madam's sickliness and 'whimsies,' were very rare, though the couple were blessed with a young family of three full-grown sons and one blooming daughter, all unfledged and unmated.

The chimney-piece of the Walnut Parlour repaid notice. Of dark oak, deeply carved, not with flutes, nor pillars, nor garlands even, but with a mass of fruit and flowers, luscious peaches, tipsy grapes, wandering wild convolvuluses, indiscriminate sheaves of lilies and of wheat ears; and disporting among

the foliage and blossoms long-tailed birds and chubby, baby-faced angels. It was executed in the affluence of an artist's fancy; and if the churches of the Middle Ages were epics in stone, that chimney-piece was an idyl in wood. The shelf whose parapet was so adorned bore only a few peacock's feathers and Squire Bolton's pipe—for indeed the low-roofed room was redolent of gallant Raleigh's Virginian weed, the *Herbe de la Reine*, which nor King, nor Pope, nor Sultan could explode; and the subtle fragrance was still perceptible when the glass door into the garden stood wide open, when the clematis and honeysuckle looked in from the porch, when the air was laden with the scent of marjoram, thyme, and lavender, and the new-mown hay on the meadows.

Up the steps hopped Sylvia's blue pigeons, and cooed an apology to the worshipful company; across the home-made carpet marched or trotted Squire Bolton's greyhounds, Sam's mastiff, Sylvia's spaniel; —truly they were less objectionable than the hob-nailed shoes of the master of the house and of young Sam, fresh from the red ploughed land, the ditch side, or the marl pit. And these offences were so universal in the country, that even squeamish Mrs. Bolton made no protest against them.

The Squire was a large, ruddy-complexioned man, more manly than handsome in feature, but with a sagacity as well as obstinacy of brow and lip that implied the well-known fact, that his sayings and jests were quoted far and near. He had the air of an undoubted gentleman, though his brown suit was soiled and thread-bare, his points often untrussed, his shirt plain, his buckles dim, his hair but half

powdered. Squire Bolton was the second man in Market Northorpe, notwithstanding the Gate-house acres were few, and the Boltons in trade, succeeding as duly by hereditary right to a bookselling and printing business, including the proprietorship of the *Northorpe Chronicle*—which, not many years before, recorded the march of a rebel army through an adjacent county—as to their paternal estate, and without the trade's branch of the inheritance, the younger members of the Bolton family would have been scantily endowed with this world's goods.

The Squire took his printers and their broadsheets easily; he looked in upon them once a day, save market-day; tossed over the pamphlets and the slim volumes, laughed heartily at the caricatures of Wilkes and his set, and the fancy sketches of men and women with cows' horns and hoofs which were to scare Dr. Jenner from his profane discovery; but had a greater affection for his pigs and geese, than for his literary stores. He was indeed a tolerably read man, but he had made a journey to London when just of age, and conceiving a great aversion to town manners, had returned home to devote himself to country pursuits, and affect a greater roughness than was natural to him—yet, pity on the contradiction, he had wedded a fine woman.

Notwithstanding this flaw in his credit, Squire Bolton was honoured at Market Northorpe as a gentleman—honest, of good parts, and resolute will. There was only one in the place greater than he, and that was Sir Charles, Lord of the Manor, Member of Parliament, courtier, he might have been duke or prince to merit the reverence with which Market

Northorpe gaped after him, although he came but seldom to the Hall to gladden their eyes with their sun; and he was not married, was getting up in years, and the next heir was of another county, at variance with the head of the house, and out of acquaintance with its subjects.

Mrs. Bolton spent a great deal of time in her own room; when she was prepared for the parlour she was mostly reclining in her cushioned chair, in her flowered silk night-gown and gauze cap, groaning over her bodily ailments, complaining of the want of genteel company; she had a passion for the country too, for nightingales and moonlight, if it were not for the horrid dews; for dining and drinking tea in the bower, but the nasty earwigs and caterpillars spoilt it all; for the dairy, only new milk made her sick. But though an absurd woman enough, one is bound to say that she was soft-hearted as well as weak-headed, and that Squire Bolton minded her extravagances so little, rather was so brisk and racy in confuting them, that a wiser partner might have been wasted on him. 'It is absolutely necessary for complete happiness in the married state, that one (of the two) should be a fool,' was an opinion mooted by Lovelace, and perhaps the expression of a requirement of his society even in its most respectable quarters.

It was not always that the three tall sons were seen under the father's roof. Mark, the second, though stated to be unfledged, was virtually transplanted into the household of Dr. Langford, who kept a private boarding establishment for young gentlemen, six or seven miles distant. Mark was

the scholar of the family, had been at Oxford along with his younger brother, and taken notable University honours; but it was not wonderful for Bachelors of Arts, or Wranglers of either University to accept the office of tutor or private chaplain, and hold it patiently for years as a stepping stone to professorship, deanery, or bishopric. If the vocation was taken up by Mark Bolton with less foresight and proved to him less fruitful, it was not the only cloud that cumbered and obscured him. While yet a lad, there descended upon him one of those unaccountable blights which it passes mortal skill to penetrate or ward off. It was not worldly disappointment, or sentimental grief, and whatever the nature of the spiritual conflict which Mark Bolton waged for a life long, neither man nor woman knew the grounds that rendered him a grave, abstracted, downcast man from his earliest youth. His own family had an awe of him; with much tenderness, Mrs. Bolton exerted herself to receive Mark; the Squire attended to his words. May all good folk deal as reverently with tossed and tried souls, called by a mystery to pass through a furnace unheated for their fellows!

Sam, the first-born and future Squire, was an unbroken colt, take him at his own word, not fit for much, save to follow Sir Charles's hounds, to ride a race, to drink a toast, or to dance the country bumpkin in earnest. His mother was in despair at his coarseness and low habits; but by the equanimity with which the Squire endured Master Sam's occasional bouts at the ale-house, or frolics in Market Northorpe when he spirited away the Mayor's gown, and hung it over the stocks, and drove a post-chaise

blindfold down the green lane one fine morning, it was plain that the old man interpreted between pure wild oats and such a crop, sown, grown, and matured, and did not give up his heir because it was the pleasure of the latter in his rare folly to be rude habitually, and a mad fool by snatches. It was in Sam's favour that Sylvia was only a little afraid of, as well as fond of him, in spite of his hectoring ways and scrapes, over which she cried her eyes out for half a day at a time.

What contrasts exist in families! Sam and Ned Bolton were of the same blood, brought up together, and save when Ned kept his terms at Oxford, whose halls and colleges were no school of manners, they moved in the same circle—yet they were as dissimilar as March and May. Ned was a slight, fair-haired, philandering parson, holding the Market Northorpe curacy, preaching once a week the mildest and shortest of sermons, a great pet of ladies, and of his mother in particular. Ned crossed his legs and tapped his snuff-box with modish grace, not that he was the least naughty, or in the faintest degree a scandal to his cloth: he scarcely ever shot or rode, he only fished, and played on the flute, and dangled a book in his hand, or danced attendance upon women, young and old, rich and poor, pretty and plain, with the most commendable impartiality. He had been known to take off his hat to his pew-opener, and carry a loaded sack up the apple-room stairs to relieve Patty Ford.

Blunt substantial tradesmen, bluff yeomen, stout squires like his father, fell into some scorn of the dandified, low-voiced pulpit swain; but so unfeignedly

gentle and kindly was he, that throughout his narrow parish, in addition to the reverence of the worthy members of the population for the representative of the Church, there was a general unacknowledged goodwill entertained for Ned Bolton in his proper person.

The clerical calling was then a singular sinecure, but it was not without its deep, still influence; and where the spotlessness of the lawn was preserved intact, it was certain, unless in very corrupt and agitated districts, to meet with regard.

So there they all were in the Walnut Parlour—the Bolton household, old and young—the Squire drinking his mug of ale, which he preferred to foreign wine; Madam Bolton pinching her frills, and declaring 'a goose had gone over her grave,' for she was taken with a shiver and must have her drops immediately; Sylvia tripping in from the midsummer garden with a lapful of rose leaves, her father exclaiming, 'Lass, you'd better ha' been weeding the turnip field;' Sam growling at the heat as he fastened the thong of his whip; Ned smiling and stretching himself, and twirling a pencil; Mark bending his thoughtful head with brain-struck sickness, in the centre of sluggish rustic health; and to complete the picture, Black George, snatching open the door, twisting off his cap, and darting into the centre of the room to announce that there was a travelling chariot with mounted servants visible on the road to Market Northorpe.

Black George was a distinguished feature in the Gate-house and its economy—an instance of the prevailing rage for coloured servants, relics of dwarfs

and jesters. Black George was the Squire's body servant, picked up when Squire Bolton was himself a young man. Born and naturalized in England, his ebony complexion and capricious and passionate temper alone separated the fellow from native domestics.

Market Northorpe knew Black George as well as it knew Squire Bolton; he was as much of a fixture at the Gate-house as his master, though an object of childish aversion to his mistress, who maintained with him an undignified and abiding war. To the others, Black George was officious, touchy, serviceable, attached; to Madam, he was mischievous, sly, and dogged; yet the poor lady had not the slightest hope of getting rid of the goat in her flock, though she persisted in a persuasion that Black George would one day poison her with rat's-bane, or stab her with a carving-knife—and then see if Squire Bolton would not repent his rashness. But as Mrs. Bolton laboured under various delusions—that she had swallowed a live wasp in a spoonful of honey, and not unfrequently heard it buzzing in its prison, and endured the agony of its sting—and that she had distinct personal intimation of the presence of spectres, whose visitations and communications were as complicated and unaccountable as those delivered in Cock-lane—the Squire may be reasonably freed from the suspicion of any wicked unconcern for his wife's safety in the deaf ear, or the mockery with which he received her charges against his major-domo.

The intimation of a travelling chariot on the road was a matter of vast interest, and drew every hearer

out to the porch; even Mrs. Bolton, with Ned's arm, managed to walk so far.

There before them lay the sunny landscape, green woods, lightly swaying meadow grass, softly rustling corn, little birds, surfeited with the warmth of the year in its prime, piping a few subdued notes, grasshoppers on the bank, bright-eyed field mice at the roots of hedges, beetles in the roses; Hodge driving the lazy cattle from the trout stream; and the chariot and six and liveried attendants, the great array of quality, quality so splendid, so effeminate, so worshipped, so despotic, wending by.

The Squire recollected himself, and affected unconcern. 'Pooh, pooh! it is only Sir Charles coming home, I warrant, and high time; but it is not likely that he will either feast us or fight us, that we should be so high on the spectacle. It might be his Grace of Cumberland, or my Lord Bute, that the Lon'oners were crazed against, to see and hear you.'

The Squire's philosophy was not infectious. 'Dear heart, Mr. Bolton, you must pay your service early to Sir Charles. I wonder if he makes a long stay. He and my mother were far away cousins, and he once handed me out of church when I was a young thing. Oh, Sylvie! that I could see you so honoured, and behaving worthy of the grace.'

'Ay, ay, Sally, there's none of the tip-top gentry that you do not lay claim to; but you have a good example in a wide kindred—Adam's family is wider still.'

'If Mr. Saville travels with Sir Charles, I had better call upon him, sir.'

'What, because he will have a fat see, long before you are a grumbling vicar, son Ned? "Make hay when the sun shines," turns out an apostolic injunction.'

'No, but I thought it but natural that two clergymen should make each other's acquaintance when they had the opportunity.' Ned defended himself sheepishly.

'And give each other suitable advice. He'll teach you the latest carving, lad, and how to blink a patron's vices.'

'I have heard no harm of Mr. Saville, sir,' with more spirit.

'No more have I, Ned: drop him.'

The Squire was in a biting humour, that was clear.

'It will be a mighty shame if Sir Charles don't finish the stables when he is here,' put in Sam, taking the first word of scolding.

'Every humble man to his hobby, and the great man to serve all.'

'I want no man to serve me,' retorted Sam, and flung off to the fields.

'How fine to count the first partners wherever you go, and own a grand coach to ride in whenever you choose,' sighed Sylvia, standing on tip-toe to catch the last glimpse of the fleeting procession.

'To go junketing night after night, girl, gaming away purse and reputation. Better stick to woollens and linens, to presses and plasters, a world better, Sylly.'

'What can bring Sir Charles down this year?' said Mark, speaking last. 'I thought he had given

up the old place since the Norfolk man shot himself in the picture gallery.'

'Hush, boy, hush,' exclaimed Mr. Bolton, sharply. 'Sir Charles suffers no comments on his own or his companions' misfortunes, no ill-timed plain-speaking. Remember that, or it may be the worse for you.'

'Have you heard of a new Parliament in the wind?'

'As to that, they have not consulted me,' confessed the Squire, composing himself. 'If there be an election, sure his Majesty don't propose opposing Sir Charles,' with a twinkle in his eye.

CHAPTER II.

HOWEVER, when Mark had ridden back to his school at Berescote, and the family were reassembled round the tea-table, Squire Bolton showed himself sufficiently roused by the baronet's arrival, and curious to ascertain its supposed motive, in announcing his intention of fulfilling that very night his engagement to tuck Sylvia under his arm—Sam and Ned and Black George were to follow at their leisure—for suburban roads of nights were not altogether safe—and Sylvia was to be deposited at Joan Littlepage's until the theatre doors were open—when he should treat them to a box at the play.

Sylvia was in ecstasy, only she had not time to put on her sweet lilac suit, and had to run here and there to provide for her mother's comforts in her absence, and to secure the punctuality of the friar's

chicken and prunes for supper on their return, and to collect her habiliments—her mantle, her hood, her muffles—so that it is to be feared she was quite blowsy before she set out, but her hazel eyes beamed all the brighter; and though the Squire never dreamt of accommodating his gait to her pace, her heart beat faster than her steps, all upon the entrancing play and a confidential chat with her dear Joan Littlepage.

Where, think you, Joan Littlepage resided? Not in any of the railed-in houses in the high street up which the Squire marched, nodding here and there; not in the close which survived the ruined cathedral, above which the new moon was rising; not in the vicarage, nor even in the doctor's dwelling; but in the back parlour of a little shop of hosiery, perfumes, gold and silver embroidery, and spangles, that was niched into an angle of the market-place. Don't suppose that Sylvia demeaned herself; Joan Littlepage had the entrance in the first houses of Market Northorpe, was the granddaughter of an unfortunate gentleman whose fortune went in the South Sea affair; her pedigree was rather better than Sylvia Bolton's, and though she had fallen to be supported by the proceeds of the little shop kept by her grandmother—a fine old lady—her faithful servant Bell, and Joan herself (on market days), not a soul in Market Northorpe ventured to look down on Mistress Joan, no, nor to condescend to her. She went to the assize balls in her ancestral brocades and diamond snaps; she stood next the Honourable Miss Annesley on the race-course. Mrs. Myres, the rich grocer's wife, felt herself highly

honoured when Mistress Joan gossiped with her over the counter, so that she was at liberty to send Mrs. Littlepage, within the hour, the offering of a pound of her best green tea, or a bag of her largest chesnuts to spit in the sea-coal fire.

Old Mrs. Littlepage was almost as rosy and hearty as the Squire; she had taken her poverty patiently, unaccompanied as it was by any diminution of the world's respect. She wore her scarlet gown, plaited frills, and drawn-silk hood while she served her customers, and was never disturbed by a sense of incongruity, or reminded painfully that she had seen better days. She could tell stories of the Bloody Circuit, and the poor maidens who cast their primroses and violets before Monmouth; and how the Princess Mary came back their queen, and was as humble and loving a wife as any village dame in all England.

Mrs. Littlepage had her cherry-brandy for the Squire, and her elder-flower wine and diet cake for Sylvia; and many a granny's 'puss,' and 'chit,' and 'sweet,' for her equally with Joan. And she loved them both so dearly, and held laborious Bell in such close esteem, and was so well disposed towards the rest of the world, that it was a marvel that she had still a large corner in her heart, and a considerable portion of her garrulous tongue, for Peter the cat.

'Come away, Sylvie,' she would say; 'give us your country news. Bless us! the girl's rosy cheeks will be the young sirs' death, one of these days. Whether is it to be young Armytage, or his cousin? You need not blush, Sylvie Bolton. Joan here stands long at the wall. Well, young Armytage's

father stole a grass-green knot, and something else, the day I won the arrow in Hathaway Park. The times have grown tame. Bonny lasses are scarce, or bold lads not so willing as they were wont. Such a capering as we used to have. Is the spinage ready, Sylvie? Has your mother tried the sprig of rosemary on her pillow to keep away restlessness and ill dreams? Bell need not mind the shop when she has that ache in her back. I'll just turn the key in the lock; if anybody else comes, they can return in the morning. Hist, Peter, do you lift your tail at Sylvie? You are very particular! you did not caterwaul two hours last night with Sim Tayler's cat that wants a leg, taken off in the rabbit's trap. He is a cunning rogue, Peter; he is up in the buckle because he caught a mouse this week; he did, Sylvie, as near a rat as need be. Will you have a pinch, my dear? No? I believe it is Ned who tries his mother's box. But you should practise it, Sylvie; if taken with an air it is a pretty accomplishment; it clears the sight, and it is a privilege of people of degree. Become your degree, Miss, that is a safe rule.'

Joan Littlepage was Mistress Joan—a swarthy but not uncomely girl, with a good carriage, a lady's ease of address, and abundant indications of sense and sprightliness in her dark, irregular face.

Our ancestors did set store on wit and capacity. The charming Lady L——s, Anna Howes, and Lady Townleys had their originals, who kept 'those wretches of men' at a most mortifying and tantalizing distance, delighted in speaking their shrewd, mischievous minds, and running the gauntlet of a

thousand merry freaks and follies, while dragging rueful captives in their chains.

At the same time there was a method in their madness, a calculation in their wildest extravagances, a little hardness and a little coarseness, combined with honest principles and cordial inclinations,—at least so it was with Joan Littlepage. Far less simple than Silvia Bolton, less generous, less tender, but sincere and kindly in her worldly wisdom—a dutiful grandchild, a fast friend.

Accordingly—to Joan Littlepage, in her undress chintz petticoat and linen jacket, busily engaged washing up and laying by the tea equipage in the little back parlour—with its silver caudle-cup, mounted deer's-horn, egg-shell china bowls, and ebony cabinet, its coarse drugget, housekeeper's presses, and kettle bubbling on the hob—the sight of her dear Sylvie Bolton was as welcome as money to the old, or love to the young.

'I'm your woman, my dear. I've been rummaging all over the house for a bit of duffle to mend Granny's petticoat; and, would you believe it, the moths have eaten three holes in my cloth habit? You might put your fingers through them; and I'm ready to drop, but I would not miss the play for a crown. They say Mrs. Daventry is equal to Mrs. Pritchard, and Leighton's a dear man—I could have run off with him myself, the fellow is so happy in his legs. I'll be ready in a trice; you'll be alone, and must go to bed early, granny; I'll tell you all the dresses and the fine speeches to-morrow.'

'Fiddle-faddle! the deuce is in the girls, they're so conceited. The old wives cannot do without

them. How did I manage before you were born, child—ay, and before your blessed mother came into the world? I'll keep Peter in order, and doctor Bell, and enjoy my own thoughts.'

'I wish you could come with us, Mrs. Littlepage.'

'La, child, I have not been across the threshold, save to church, these half-dozen years, only when Molly Parnell was taken, and the goodman at Gloucester. But I sang the Carol with the best of them last Christmas; and I never weary of my thoughts, Sylvie, child—how I knew this one, and that one, and what they said and did long ago. It is better than any book, save the *Bible* and *Clarissa*. Oh! that vile man—oh! that suffering angel!—Children, beware in time.'

'If she had only not written to him,' suggested Sylvia, piteously.

Mrs. Littlepage corrected her.

'It was to hear the particulars of the Grand Tour, my dear; and her friends authorized it at first—you recollect—but once begin, never end.'

'I would have married him, and scratched his eyes out next day,' said Joan, from the closet where she was making her toilette. The old woman and the young continued to discourse with enthusiasm on the creations of their great enchanter—whose shades moved the hearts of thousands and cost rivers of tears. How wise Clarissa was, how sweetly dignified; how wicked Lovelace, how cruel her family, how instructive the dear martyr's death! With lifted hands, and sighs and alacks! as if they had passed the personages in the streets, ate and

drank in their company, worn mourning for their untimely end.

When Joan Littlepage re-entered in her carnation paduasoy and black velvet hat, the Squire, Sam, and Ned were all come, and impatient to be off for the prologue, written by Johnson and first spoken by Garrick. But prior to their departure the Squire gallantly saluted Madam Littlepage, and immediately afterwards entered into a violent contention with her, on his decision of not returning to supper—during which Sam and Ned had an opportunity of showing their manners to Mrs. Littlepage's fair granddaughter. Very formal these manners, in spite of their intimacy, very profound the bowing and courtesying!

'Madam, your servant.'

'Sir, I'm obliged to you.'

'I'm glad that you mean to honour the play with your presence.'

'We hear so few pretty speeches elsewhere, that we are grateful to the stage.'

'You are hard, Miss Littlepage.'

'You are covetous, Mr. Ned Bolton; you take things to yourself; your brother is more discreet.'

'I can't abide flattery.'

'Vastly humble, Mr. Sam, if—it often comes in your way.'

Ned simpering and complacent, Sam bashful and uncouth, Joan bridling with power and play.

The dispute between the principals ended, the company set out, forming on their walk as tasteful a little private show as the populace of Market Northorpe could gloat over.

The Squire led them, his broad-brimmed beaver and firm calves calculated to impress his satellites. The two girls walked next—jet and pearl—mincing, as those peaked shoes, ample tucked-up skirts, and poised head-gear compelled their wearers to mince; one of them glancing slily back at their young cavaliers, both bright with the keen anticipation of enjoyment. The two young men dressed with care, as men of condition of all tastes and tempers then distinguished themselves in public—their ruffles spotless, their coats unexceptionable—no groom-like roughness, no student's slovenliness. Black George closed the file, in his grey livery, with a cane and a nosegay, strutting as one who would strongly maintain his master's dignity.

The theatre then was sure of its audience—grave citizens, learned scholars and divines, men of rank and note, the worthy and good, were included among the numerous play-goers.

Tradesmen carried thither their spruce wives and daughters to have a holiday of both eyes and ears; to pay heed to the fortunes of George Barnwell, the idle apprentice; to weep for the degradation of Jane Shore; to applaud Jessy Oatland; to laugh and scold the Good-Natured Man. The neighbouring gentry came in once or twice a week, to break, by a lively intellectual diversion, the monotony of their round games and their country dances.

There were then well-employed country companies, respected and respectable among their compeers, who had never set foot on London boards, and who could yet do justice to the brilliance of Congreve, Farquhar, Moore, and Sheridan—a sad pity that

there was so much that was low and bad to pollute that pleasant and cheerful sparkle, and render it often pernicious and sometimes ghastly; besides there were great stars that now and then condescended to blaze in a confined firmament, and represent what Shakspeare wrote, as the world's poet meant it.

Each country town had its theatre, with decent accommodation, full support—and, to do it justice, frequent benefits for charitable and benevolent purposes.

The Boltons found therefore no empty house, no lack of comrades in their gadding. The Squire shook hands with the manager, whose playbills and fugitive pieces were thrown off at Mr. Bolton's printing-office, and who had quitted the green-room to receive the Mayor and Corporation, his express patrons that evening; and the Boltons were shown to the Squire's favourite box, where, before the curtain drew up, the girls had time to nod to many of their acquaintances—the Olivers, the Parnells, the Singletons, the Norrises—besides fanning themselves at the mere spectacle of the crush and heat in the pit, where there was invariably a sailor who would be noisy and troublesome—one would think he came on purpose—and who uniformly called forth first the laughter, and then the wrath of the assembly.

The curtain drew up on a rustic cottage and a mysterious gentleman in a horseman's cloak; and Sylvia crossed her hands and set herself to be entranced by the story, all in a tremble the one moment, smiling with satisfaction the next; never criticising except when she could not help it—when

her attention was laid hold of by the late entrance of company into an opposite box—two gentlemen, strangers to the town, one of them remarkable enough to attract a large proportion of eyes from the piece.

The chief was a young gentleman, a very fine young gentleman, to whom, in appearance, Sylvia's brothers were nothing, so splendidly was he attired for the occasion: scarlet coat and vest edged with gold lace; cocked hat, laced also; Mechlin cravat; hair powdered to the last puff. Moreover, he was a fine-looking young fellow, fit to do justice to his extravagance. His companion was but a respectable shadow in black, who might be good Mr. Bennet the chaplain, or learned Dr. Hughes the physician.

A great buzz went through the boxes: some young friend of Sir Charles come down that afternoon to bear him company at the Hall, certainly a person of consequence, affably disposed to grace the town in its drama. Market Northorpe was properly elated.

In the meantime the performance went on, and the audience had it in their power to scrutinize the stranger thoroughly, and he to stare about him, which, without rudeness, he did freely. He looked especially, and with reason, at the Boltons' box, openly, and behind his playbill, repeating the compliment as if something within its bounds struck, and irresistibly attracted him.

'Lord! how that grand fellow notices you, Sylvia; he cannot give you up. I think you have made a conquest,' whispered Joan Littlepage.

Sylvia was manœuvring her fan, with her sweet

face as pink as a rose. Of course she denied the implication.

'Why do you say he is looking at me? He is looking about him; it is at you as well.'

'Not he,' returned Joan, nonchalantly. 'Nobody looks at my black face until I open my mouth; some impudent young town spark. I would call the man to order, if I were you, my dear.'

But the face which so wilfully followed Sylvia Bolton was not impudent; bold it might be, and frank, but an honest young face, fair as Sylvia's own, only somewhat sunburnt, more so than those of most Londoners who spent their hours at routs and rackets, in taverns and gaming-houses.

Between the acts, Mr. Bolton left his seat to chat in the lobby with elderly gossips and politicians, always ready to discuss public affairs—what Cornwallis was about, any signs of another Lisbon earthquake; and his place was filled up by one young male acquaintance or another inclined for a change of position, or aspiring to be gallant, bringing the young ladies oranges, or venturing to break a lance in lively discourse with Joan Littlepage.

Such a chance guest satisfied the girls' curiosity regarding the new-comer — Mr. Guy Hathaway, Sir Charles's young relative, fresh from Cambridge.

There was a little disappointment—he might have been a peer's son, at least, but was only Mr. Guy! —which, however, soon subsided, and was succeeded by pleasant and sagacious inferences and comparisons. Mr. Guy, who had been about Market Northorpe when a child, and for that matter was born in the

neighbourhood, grown into so accomplished a young man!

So like the Guy Hathaway branch, to introduce himself with this foolish flourish of finery (they were all good-humoured, vain, brave, warm-hearted, improvident gentlemen, these Guy Hathaways)—deputed from Sir Charles's dinner-table, doubtless to achieve a little extra popularity—the herald to the town following close upon Sir Charles's unexpected appearance at the Hall, what could be at the bottom of this excitement?

The Hathaways were an old Saxon family reckoning an honourable descent of scores of generations; yet it is not known that they counted kindred with the yeoman's daughter, Ann Hathaway who won the heart of the wool-comber's son, Will Shakspeare. Parallel with the main stem, illustrated by Sir Charles, ran a collateral bough of the family tree, as gay and green and, in a mercenary light, unprofitable, as the other was robust and affluent. The younger branch was in fact habitually dependent upon the bounty of the elder, and seemed incapable of rising into individual and separate prosperity; however portioned and provided for the representatives were, and they had at no time been very numerous, they invariably returned, either in their own persons or in those of their children, privileged claimants on the interest and the liberality of their leaders. Yet among swarms of similar inferiors, pensioners, led captains, the poor Hathaways were honourably unsullied by servility and rapacity, by second-hand insolence and profligacy; they were manly, open-handed, and true, if not much encum-

bered with forethought or application, and if sometimes reckless and spendthrift; friendly mediators between the great man and the townspeople; held in affectionate respect and regard, their follies excused, their dashing qualities applauded, perhaps more beloved if less feared than the veritable owners of the Hall.

Thus, when the first sensation passed, and Mr. Guy was generally recognised, there was a reaction, and a cordial current in his favour pervaded the house. There was even an attempt at a demonstration in the guise of a little cheering when he rose to go, and then he bowed with shy, pleasant bluster, and a few of the secondary gentry pressed forward to accost him, and attain precedence in his good graces. ¶ Therefore Sylvia Bolton wondered whether he would think of opening and occupying the park cottage which had belonged to his father; and whether poor Patty Ford, his old nurse—lightheaded since she had the brain fever, in consequence of allowing him, as a baby, to fall over the elder bushes into the half-choked marl pit, an accident from which he escaped miraculously with life and limb—would go clean out of her wits now that she saw him such a gallant young master.

Starting, half consciously, from a long silence in their walk home at the sober hour of nine, when the sunset was yet crimson in the west, Sylvia addressed her father with a fear that they had left Mrs. Littlepage discontented at their obstinate refusal of her entertainment.

Squire Bolton had been as mute as Sylvia, and he aroused himself with a still greater effort.

'In displeasure, did you say? A plaguy old lady, not to allow people to know their own minds. Baked meats not good enough to tempt our appetites! prodigious nice ones she must judge them. For my part, I'd as lief feed on beans and bacon as on roasts and stews, and ragouts and sauces. Do you agree, Sylly?'

'I don't know, father; I never tried,' Sylvia replied, with a laugh: nevertheless, her father urged the inquiry gruffly, as if her hilarity did not suit him.

'To churn the butter in place of toying it into pats; to poach the eggs where you wasted them in custards; to sit among the flitches, earthenware, and bricks of a kitchen instead of the drugget and wainscot of a parlour; to play at blindman's-buff, and telling stories in place of *Love after Supper*, and *Commerce*, and such mummeries as *Minuettes de la Cour;* to wear your pockets for use, not show, and plain skirts and calicos for trains and brocades—but to keep a brave heart and a clear conscience. It would not be intolerable, would it, Sylly?'

'No, I don't think I should mind it,' granted Sylvia, considering, 'if I did not see people who had been my friends before; for you know, sir, they would feel surprised, and might not be inclined to follow my example.'

'You are a little fool, like the rest of them,' ejaculated the Squire, so pettishly, that although Sylvia was puzzled to read his meaning, she did not care to prolong the argument.

CHAPTER III.

SIR CHARLES and Mr. Guy Hathaway called the next day at the Gate-house; they came in state, as if they had been to wait on the Lord-Lieutenant.

Sylvia hurried to her mother's room with the great news the moment she descried Sir Charles alighting at the gate.

Mrs. Bolton was in a fuss—she must go down to welcome Sir Charles, little as she was able for it. Mr. Bolton would be very careless of the entertainment, and would expose his country breeding: but at the same time she must be dressed in her best to receive her distinguished connexion — so Sylvia brought out the worked suit, the clocked stockings, and the paint-pot; and after Mrs. Bolton had been laced and touched up, and had swum here and there to try the effect—when Sylvia had pantingly completed her labours, Black George looked in upon them with a grin, and demanded if he should set the table for dinner.

'What do you mean, fellow?' inquired Mrs. Bolton, with great scorn. 'Is there no more fitting refreshment for Sir Charles than a vulgar family meal? Fly down to the cellar, Sylvie, and remember the cut glasses.'

'Mercy on us! madam,' in affected dismay, 'Sir Charles and his young man left half an hour ago—and the Squire has gone out likewise, although it is

past noon—and Mr. Sam is fidgeting to be off pigeon-shooting.'

'Get out of my sight, you ugly crow! He's mocking me, I know he is, and so are you, Sylly, to make me rise and have on my fine things when you knew how ill I was, and all for nothing. Oh, what a world it is! What wretches everywhere!' and poor Mrs. Bolton fell back in violent hysterics.

When Sylvia tried to recover her mother with hartshorn, and burnt feathers, and the unfailing drops, the truth must be told that the sick lady rallied for a moment from her gulps and snatches to administer to Sylvia's round, officious, vexed face a sound slap, and sent the good daughter wounded and aggrieved from the room.

'Shall I run out and look for the Squire, Miss? Shall I lay a cover in the pantry for Mr. Sam? I'll undertake the sage for the goose, Miss Sylvie; only trust me,' pleaded Black George, penitently; but Sylvia, though the last person in the world to bear malice, could not at once forget his offence and its consequences.

Mr. Bolton and Ned came in together—Ned disposed to be talkative, the Squire taciturn, which was not his ordinary habit.

There was to be a dissolution of Parliament; the clever writing men to whom the senate of Liliput owed so much, would be saved a great deal of ingenious invention, and the seat—the old Hathaway seat—was actually to be contested. A Londoner, whom nobody knew, except that he belonged to the treasonable and revolutionary

Opposition, was coming down to oppose Sir Charles in his own county.

Ned Bolton enlarged on the absurdity of the measure, and the precarious and discreditable position into which the aspirant was about to thrust himself, the Squire saying nothing, looking up now and then as if he listened—that was all.

Of course Ned was edified by Sir Charles's dignity. He had struck Sylvia from a distance as a slight, sallow, insignificant figure of a man, even in velvet and lace; yet no question but that spending all his life in the highest society, presiding in power, and patronage, would render him a noble gentleman. True it is—and a great modern observer has recalled it to us—that with all their errors, and their frequent guilt and misery—the state they maintained, the homage they received, made of even the most ordinary men of that aristocracy magnates more or less superb.

Mr. Guy, Ned said, was unassuming, and inclined to be familiar with Sam on field sports; they were what were naturally in his way—though Sir Charles might provide for him by an office under Government, or a commission in the army, any day.

Ned invited Sylvia to take an airing in the garden. She still strove to swallow her disappointment at missing so auspicious an incident in their lives as Sir Charles's call—he had asked for the ladies, too, and wished to pay his compliments to them, but the Squire put him off. She would so have liked a peep, to be able to report to Joan Littlepage, although Mr. Guy was a little too bad—and at that idea Sylvia hung her head and plaited her volu-

minous muslin apron, embroidered by her own nimble fingers; while Ned still impressed upon the child what a great man Sir Charles was, how honoured they were by his slightest notice, how foolish of any stranger to oppose him—that only a stranger could have presumed so unwarrantably and wildly, and exposed himself to certain disgrace, even danger.

Market Northorpe was yet more concerned about Sir Charles's errand than it had been on his unannounced presence at the Hall. Such a wild-goose scheme, such a daring Lon'oner!

There was a faction against venerable authority, as where is there not a faction? but it was so small, so contemptible—the Methodist tanner, (the Methodists were very weak at Market Northorpe)—the seditious, infidel basket-maker—'Torney Aylott, who was suspected of lending money on usury—the ruined yeoman who had been in jail for poaching.

The party was so worthless that it scarcely merited the notice of a ducking. It was not even likely that cold, proud Sir Charles, vindictive though he was, would demean himself to be revenged on such a crew.

Still, paltry as the fuel was, all Market Northorpe kindled into a blaze, and after it had cried out at the audaciousness of the invader, so far from falling back on the plenitude of its superiority, it prepared to punish the disturbers of its tranquillity to their hearts' content.

Heads of guilds met to reinforce restrictions on trade, and old municipal rights, which should effectually fetter and famish suspected interlopers,

and hangers-on for the custom of the place. Bands of apprentices and journeymen assembled with little concealment, to practise musters and plans of action which should reduce the new candidate to enter the town with a guard of soldiers.

Already it was within a week of the election, and the streets were less orderly, the population more unsettled, than they had been found for years; and Sylvia, calling for Joan Littlepage, dared not stay for a dish of tea, not even at the primitive hour of four, under the risk of mortally offending Mrs. Littlepage on the only point whereon she was sore and punctilious—the hospitality of herself, Joan, Bell, and Peter.

Mrs. Littlepage proved more reasonable than could have been expected, and Joan was somehow out of sorts, for she bounced off her seat every time there was a tap on the counter without, and insisted on serving all the customers during Sylvia's visit.

'Stout worsted for riding hose? Here is a cable twist, an't please you; and come, Letty, coax Goody to buy you a few yards of red riband for strappers, and I will give you a comb into the bargain.'

Strange to see Joan Littlepage put out, but the truth was she and Granny were full of a scandalous tale which had reached their ears regarding their friends at the Gate-house. They hesitated to speak it out to Sylvia lest she should resent it as too gross an aspersion to be borne, even in mere repetition from the lips of friends.

At last Madam Littlepage could hold in no longer. 'I could never ha' believed it, Sylvie; your father, who is as well-born as any of us, to

desert his class, and go with the scum of the town!'

'To vote against Sir Charles, who may be Beelzebub, but who is still Sir Charles,' echoed Joan, irresistibly.

'To sink himself and his family! Not one of the gentry, not a respectable merchant; and the Lon'oner may be in business himself—may sell coals, or write plays, for aught we know. Oh, Sylvie, it is a sore come-down, and a stain upon the whole community.'

Sylvia was amazed, affronted, and resentful. She did not know why her father, of all the men in the world, should be accused of looseness of opinion and baseness of conduct. She could not think why Market Northorpe dared bring such a charge against him. But the Littlepages shook their heads, and averred they did not wish to be convinced—far from it—of what was so detrimental to the Boltons' honour and interest, but Sir Charles's steward was circulating it in the town. Plainly, Squire Bolton would not back his master, and declared his intention of upholding the stranger.

And Squire Bolton had no accredited provocation; the Boltons had never come in hostile contact with the Hathaways. During the entire history of the respective houses, Sir Charles had not 'stolen their ox,' or defrauded them in heart or reputation. They had been old neighbours, and, although by no means equals, on fair terms.

The serious defection came like a thunderbolt on Market Northorpe; and so great was the shock, so considerable the personal influence that Squire

Bolton had wielded, that, had not his flagrant contumacy been directed against their ruler, the townspeople might have been shaken in their allegiance. As it was, their condemnation was unanimous, and kept pace with their wonder.

Sylvia went home piqued, frightened, and distressed, stumbling in the broad sunshine, up the green lanes where the beech leaves were already crisp and tawny; by the Hathaway woods, one uniform mass of colour; past Mr. Guy's cottage, where the jessamine straggled in neglected luxuriance, except on one side, where it had been blighted by lightning, and clung, a dead, black, network shroud, to the mossy wall; along the white dusty road into their own trim garden, where she had carried so few heavy thoughts, or incomprehensible, inevitable cares; straight to the Walnut Parlour, where she entered upon the whole family assembled in conclave to discuss the tidings which had preceded her—puzzled, displeased, indignant but credulous faces, because Squire Bolton was too original and independent not to have already startled his children, and convinced them, ere now, that he preserved in full his right of private verdict, unswayed by the awful weight of public opinion.

The servants in a house are apt to be better informed than their superiors. The rumour of the Squire's perverseness had reached his kitchen, and Black George had felt instigated to hint it pretty broadly that day to Madam Bolton. The Squire, silent as stone previously, while his children unsuspiciously retailed the Market Northorpe political creed, was subjected to an immediate conjugal and

filial attack, to which he had the courage to plead guilty. He was still at the bar when Sylvia entered, and court and culprit presented themselves to her alarmed scrutiny.

The Squire was the most prominent figure in the group, one brown hand holding his beloved pipe, the other resting on the table before him. Firm as granite the old man looked, but grave, for he alone of all that clamorous band had fully counted the costs.

Mrs. Bolton was sighing and groaning, and declaring that 'Mr. Bolton's shameful conduct would bring her to the grave.' Sam stood leaning against the chimney-piece, hostile, as if he also were not as rough and gruff as the most cross-grained specimen of protest and resistance; Ned was flushed and pained, peaceable to a degree, but driven to bay, his own father the aggressor, on his feet, too, because it was the more respectful posture, fluttering his white hand among his ruffles, and looking at the ground; and last, arrested at the door, Sylvia, with her unfastened mantle falling from her shoulders, her bare round arms, her hat hanging from her hand by its long strings, and her scared face.

Mr. Bolton, with all his sarcastic humour, was a candid and indulgent father. Hence this outbreak. Besides, the effects of his resolution concerned all, and were momentous enough to warrant resistance on the part of his family.

'You were always a cruel man, Mr. Bolton,' raged his lady; 'considering nobody but yourself in your deeds. But you'll repent this, sir; you'll repent it!'

The Squire was serious, but his sense of the ridiculous could not resist this appeal.

'My life!' he said, bowing low, 'I hope you don't mean to be the instrument of retribution; I hope you have more tenderness for your nerves and your affections.'

His incensed wife covered her face, and through her teeth styled him 'a wretch,' as she designated Black George twenty times a day; but she probably used the word in a modified sense, as ladies then bestowed it freely without any excess of virulence, and on far less provocation, against teasing lovers and husbands. 'These wretches of men,' we suspect, was a phrase capable of becoming complimentary and endearing; but by Madam Bolton it was not now employed in a kind sense—no, not by any means.

'Indeed, sir,' urged Ned, 'for a man who has all his life preserved a character for sense and sobriety, the father of a family, the head of a respectable house, to be guilty of so violent a step—such a change of colours.'

'You are wrong there, Ned,' exclaimed the Squire, abruptly; 'I have not turned my coat. I could not help wanting an opportunity to parade its real side.'

'If it had been a stand-out for a good end,—to put down the turnpikes, to get up a new body of yeomen, to support skittles and football, and keep out papists and foreigners,' Sam complained; 'but to side with a pack of low beggars, who would make us all shopkeepers together; I cannot understand it, father.'

'Well, Sylly, your mother and your brothers have spoken their minds, and now it is your turn. What have you to say against your father's proceedings?

It ain't polite or prudent. It is shameful, this row, eh?'

The address made Sylvia's heart swell with a sudden, swift, strong reaction; she walked to her father's side and clasped her hands tight on his arm:—

'Do what you think right, papa; you know best.'

The innocent words of confidence and submission almost overthrew the Squire's composure; but he recovered himself, and striking his fist on the table, gave his family an explanation of his motives in living words from whose stern sincerity and force they recoiled.

'Wife and children, you think me possessed, bent on branding your position and prospects with a mark which they will not survive, for no reason but my own folly or wickedness. Not so. When I was younger than you, boys, I went up to Lon'on, and I saw life there; life the result of a luxurious, despotic upper class, and a subservient, cringing people. I mixed in it—rubbed clothes with the bullies and the beaux, the rakes and harlots, the statesmen who had 'their price,' the thieves who never saw Tyburn, the priests who preached unmoved, the authors who beslavered the very handmaids of high places. I don't say that I was without sin, or that I came back unstained; but while I hated my kind I swore that, if I ever saw the day, I would raise my voice in the View Halloo to pull down those cursed barriers that make men either sultans or slaves. There may be rascals engaged in the work, I cannot help it; the first stones displaced may crush me and mine, I have no notion of proving coward, any more than

rogue. There is a motion against these monstrous privileges; and although I have no great stomach for the Dissenters, Ned—nor for the Sir Andrew Freeports, Sam—the deuce take it but they may mend public matters, since they cannot mar them, though they are not the fashion in Market Northorpe. Sir Charles and his kind have misruled the morals of the nation long enough. So there is the plain fact of the matter. And now, son Ned, you may sneak after patronage, and reprobate me if you will; and you, Sam, may swear and drink to my confusion, and ride yourself whipper-in to Sir Charles—possibly, in spite of your name, as he remains a bachelor, he may allow you the lowest seat at his table and a place at the meet. And you, madam, aid and abet your sons —it is not the first time that wives have been unfaithful, and children undutiful in the cause of the great. But don't you break your heart, little Sylly; you and I, and poor Mark, who does not heed the world's wind and tide, will let the rest go, and weather the storm in company, though we save but a crust of bread and a cup of water.'

So Squire Bolton marched out from the middle of the confounded malcontents.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE must have been sweet blood in these incongruous Boltons; spite of sufficient exasperation and an incapacity to master the argument, they did not desert their head.

Not only Mark, who launched a strangely incorporeal and impartial epistle into the heat and passion of Market Northorpe, deponing that there were germs of truth in the mutual pleas of most general questions, proceeding to quote Brutus against Cæsar, and Cæsar against Brutus—but timorous Ned and blustering Sam. The old man might be in the main crotchety and stubborn, and their principles were different as they were ready to prove, but that should not prevent them standing by him and his, least of all when it might become their interest to fail him. No one else should cry him down, and they looking on and listening to the 'Hark for'ard.' No, no, whatever their private lamentations might be, they were not ashamed of him. They did stand by him, Ned lackadaisically, Sam doggedly.

Mrs. Bolton herself was not more than usually humoursome, and only occasionally bore witness that her goodman had the characteristics of both serpent and bear; that she knew the sting of that perennial wasp aggravated by his unheard-of and unchristian behaviour, and cankering beyond alleviation from Hollands and herb tea. Sylvia was full of fright that papa should see fit to oppose quality like Sir Charles, whom God had exalted to govern them, but united the extremes of love and indignation on the Squire's behalf, faithful fondness for him, vehement anger against his adversaries—were he to constitute himself sheriff of the county, vicar of the parish, mayor of the town, in one, and proceed to tax, fine, and coerce the inhabitants on his own authority, it would have been alike to Sylvia. Although new to adverse circumstances, she discovered herself fertile

in ingenious devices to divert the attention and soothe the asperity of the culprit and martyr; he should see the boys play bowls—he should tell her what to do with her young pheasants—he should try his toast and tankard, and forgive his Sylly for burning the one and spilling the other, because she had such a riddle for him as would take him a week to solve.

Once exalted to be a man of note, an oracle, and a model, to ever so small a portion of our fellow-creatures, it is hard to endure the reverse. Poor Squire Bolton was now experiencing the inconstancy of favour, and although he nodded his head disdainfully, and bore up like a man, he felt the sentence with all his English single-heartedness and pride. It was hard to stamp down Market Northorpe-street, and find only averted faces; to lounge for an afternoon in his printing-office, uncheered by a single listener to the last London columns; to be shamefully omitted from the Mayor's dinner; to sit in his pew in church, and hear the parson whom his son Ned assisted, preach for an hour and a half on the fraternal baseness of Aaron and Miriam, the eyes of the congregation supplying the point, and he only able to bless himself that Madam Bolton was not present to beat an accompaniment—and to know, ay, to have it carved on his inmost heart, that, while Sir Charles smiled superciliously and snapped his fingers, he would compass heaven and earth to win for him the wages of whiggery.

In the mean time, the business of the election went on the more briskly on account of the absence of unanimity. Sir Charles spared nothing; he

feasted and flattered; he condescended to visit the principal townsmen standing uncovered before him; he gave substantial earnests of friendship and regard to husbands and fathers—and for pretty, prating, wilful wives and daughters, he ordered all the top-knots in Mrs. Littlepage's shop, with hoods and beaver hats, and sets of lace neckerchiefs and aprons by the score, from London; he opened the taverns, and entertained the topers royally at his own cost. Mr. Guy, with his comely face and pleasant tongue, made himself universally agreeable; patted and tossed up the children; chucked the girls; handed up and down the simpering old bodies—and just for a frolic, and to enable Mr. Lane, the cheese-factor, to attend a meeting of the corporation, whipped on his apron, and dispensed pound upon pound of double Glouces-ter and Cheshire, at Sir Charles's expense, to who-ever would favour him with his custom.

The town rang with Mr. Guy's glory; and as if gaiety and gallantry, and a nature that was honest and true at the core, were not enough, Sir Charles brought down his beautiful, fashionable niece, Mrs. Latimer, to preside over his banquets, and grace his gatherings, and altogether to dazzle, dumbfounder, and double-chain his people.

The fine ladies, a hundred years ago—what stories are told of their wealth of beauty and wit! How skittish they were; how hair-brained; what lengths they went to attain an end; how they cast it aside when gained. Mrs. Latimer was such a one; she had danced at Ranelagh and Vauxhall; she had gambled; she had masqueraded; had 'drunk, sworn, and smoked,' when it suited a purpose; she had

celebrated her follies at Richmond, and her whims at Greenwich; and she too had saved her reputation, and escaped the small-pox. She came to the country jaded with cards, auctions, and court-dresses, to stimulate herself with doing a little bit of friendship to Sir Charles by securing his election. Half a century afterwards, Market Northorpe had traditions of her wondrous loveliness, grace, and affability; how she toasted every guest; led off Sir Roger de Coverley each time she could find partners for her men; invited all the young people to London to visit her—and promised to return to the Hall to celebrate in person the marriage of each of the young ladies; made the favours, and pinned them on the breasts of the bashful voters; begged a loan of Mrs. Myres' shawl, and wore it knotted round her clipsome waist on the hustings; and, greatest feat of all, waylaid the poacher farmer, and by fair means or foul, by liberty to shoot in the Hathaway preserves every moonlit night in the season, by a thirty years' lease of his little farm, or by a bold challenge to kiss her rosy mouth while she held a guinea between her white teeth, one way or other, carried him triumphantly in her own carriage, a hot recreant to the polling-booth.

Sylvia Bolton would have given her two delicate ears to have met and been noticed by Mrs. Latimer—to have had her borrow her patterns as she begged those of the Parnells and Olivers, (she had the newest in town, which she would be sure to forward to her good friends in future; but she was a sad grig the moment her feet touched the pavement, and could only work in the country,) to have seen her

hold up her quilted satin petticoat and display her twinkling feet in the last step, laughing and bidding them keep time, more like poor merry Anne Boleyn than her wise daughter Queen Bess.

But all this enjoyment was denied Sylvia by her father's eccentricity, and it was a sign of her unselfishness that she resigned it only with a little sigh and without a particle of malice against the origin of her loss. So rare, too, were the little girl's coveted opportunities of studying finished manners, so perpetually her mother worried her on her homeliness.

The efforts of the intruding candidate were quite eclipsed. They were confined to riding over with several servants, supposed to be constables in disguise, and taking up his residence at the surly tanner's, where the effluvia from the skins and the bark would have driven away a nose of the least gentility. Certainly, the inns in Market Northorpe refused to admit him within their ever-open doors, and the Gate-house was too far out of the way to serve as head-quarters; and considering that he was exposing himself to considerable personal risk, and dared not appear abroad after nightfall, perhaps his presence alone merited a little more gratitude, without noticing the rival hoods, beaver hats, and aprons which, as they were of no finer material or more excellent device than the baronet's, were rejected with scorn.

The volunteer member was only the son of a great Bristol merchant, and it was alleged that his only sister had been run away with by a gentleman of Sir Charles's rank in life. He was a man of parts and judgment, the desperate nature of his enterprise

not subjecting him to a charge of headstrong folly —for every cause has its beginning, and the infancy of a genuine, wholesome, democratic element was —with a few exceptions, where the influence leapt at once into vigour—thus struggling into hardy growth throughout the country.

When his voice was heard, Mr. Joyce spoke with the fervour of conviction against family boroughs, closed parliaments, coal and salt taxes, Walcheren expeditions—causing Squire Bolton to smack his lips and clap his hands in fiery approval; but Mr. Joyce was seldom allowed speech; and when the election day arrived, they were intrepid gentlemen who, from a neighbouring county, appeared and walked along with Squire Bolton of the Gate-house to confront Sir Charles Hathaway and his exulting host.

That scene—has not Hogarth immotalized its minutest traits directly or by implication? The clamour, the commotion, the huzzaing, the hissing and hooting, the pelting with mud, soot, and dead cats, with fragments of earthenware and deadly brickbats—the roar of joy and derision, when Sir Charles was proclaimed member—the swaying of the mob to engulph the beaten man and his friends as they descended from the platform, the prompt masterly retreat of the vanquished, the rising yell of vengeance from their pursuers, the magistrates supine and agitated, the buffoons in vain exerting their waggery, the riotous braggart and brutal, the escape of the compact band from the back premises of the tan-work, and Squire Bolton's gallop home to quiet the apprehensions of his family, and man the

Gate-house if necessary—these and a thousand other traits the earlier Thackeray limned for posterity in touches fresh as yesterday.

That night the Gate-house was surrounded by a throng of light-headed, besotted folk, cramming the terraces, trampling down Sylvia's sweet-peas, larkspur, and sunflowers, assembled there for the purpose of meanly abusing their success, and galling their old friend and new foe by burning under his nose and the noses of his family the effigies of the whole household.

A strange contrast; the calm, sweet summer twilight—the jeering, groaning crowd, many a woman's mob cap and scarlet cloak among the men's smock-frocks, here and there a slouched, muffled, stealthy air, as if better-to-do persons mixed in the outbreak, but were ashamed of it even then; the thick volumes of smoke and flare of burning wood and resin, rising into the blue sky; and ranged in a grotesque row, facing the carefully shuttered parlour window, parent and child, a whole cavalcade of Banquo's spectres, or Punches and Judies—the oddest mixture of tragic and comic, with a cast of true art in the hanging head and the salts of Madam Bolton, the hoe and clouted shoes of the Squire, Ned's white neckcloth, Mark's vest buttoned awry and his hat reversed, Sam's gun and kennel, and poor Sylvia's huge nosegay, even to Black George brandishing a toasting-fork.

Within the darkened room, the family through chinks and crevices inspected the demonstration. The Squire had been with difficulty withheld from throwing out his old hunting coat and peruke a

contribution to the masquers' wardrobe, but watched warily notwithstanding, for who could tell when their rough play would turn to rougher earnest, and beneath his lapels, unseen by the women, he grasped his pistols. Ned was quieting his mother in most genuine hysterics; and although the poor fellow was white and shocked, he stood between her and the danger, and reassured her by cool words, to which his beating heart was an involuntary traitor.

'Now, my dear madam, it is just a pretty little show—will be over presently—diverts the poor people. See, Sam and Sylly are absolutely enjoying it.'

He stretched a point about Sylly; but Sam did appear to appreciate the scene, so greedily he peered at it, barely stifling his fierce desire that the rioters should come on and do farther mischief, though he had not even the sword which he wore abroad, but only a stout ashen stick, which he held like a vice.

Sylvia was terrified, but with something stimulating in her alarm, something keen and self-forgetful, that kept her from shrieking and shaking, and made her kneel in the shadow of Sam's arm and gaze with a blanched face, but clear eyes, upon the actors and prompters on this familiar stage. She could not help a little wild, nervous laugh, when an incautious movement brought her shadow there, without, toppling down among the feet of the others. Her father cried, 'Hush! hush! Sylly;' Ned was scandalized; Mrs. Bolton sobbed that she was a little vixen; but she did not mind them much at that moment.

The most excited spectator of the great dolls was

Black George. A farm servant or two, summoned hastily, stood stolid, with goggle eyes, and now and then an irresistible grin; the very women were generally more indignant than appalled; but the West Indian was beside himself with bootless rage —he writhed, he ejaculated, his dark eyes seemed to scintillate, he danced with frenzy. He rushed in with shoe-brushes and table knives, and a boiler of hot water, to hurl at his tormentors; but when their shouts waxed louder, and they pressed against the thick door, a shiver ran through his limbs, his olive skin grew green with horror—passionate, furious, reckless, Black George might be, gallant for one moment, but not steadfastly courageous for two.

It indicated the amount of Mrs. Bolton's consternation rather than her penetration, when she fraternized with her enemy in this their common strait, calling upon him to stand by her in her need, and die in the defence of her and Sylvia, and she would forgive all his offences, yes, everything; while Mr. Bolton and Sam, and the farming men were growling to him to be quiet and be hanged to him.

After a full display of their figures, the ringleaders prepared to dispose of them in a graphic, significant style; they applied a lit match to the powder already stored in their interiors, and with a hiss, crack, and blaze, and a roar of applause, blew them up in simultaneous ruin.

There was something savage in the pantomime, and the ruthless yell which accompanied it. The Squire and Sam set their teeth; Sylvia covered her face; Ned, with the sweat-drops on his brow, called for help, for his mother was fainting; and

Black George grew suddenly silent and chill as death.

At that moment a horse's hoofs sounded sharply on the neighbouring road; there was a pause, a stillness of surprise and expectation, unmingled with apprehension, for the populace had the might on their side—a solitary figure rode in at the wide open gate, and straight up the main path.

'Good Lord! the boy,' ejaculated Mr. Bolton, flinging up the window in utter oblivion of personal peril. No one observed him, not a man took advantage of the action. All eyes were fixed on Mark Bolton, riding with his white, abstracted face directly under the Gate-house porch. He had not tightened his reins, he looked neither to the right hand nor to the left; he made a little gesture for the mob to divide before him, the only token he gave of their presence—and give way they did, cleaving asunder, a faint hooting in the outer circle dying unsupported, the glowing eyes turned to him, fixed in their gaze. Right noble he looked—the pale young usher—though they did not say it, like the inhabitant of another world in his wan weariness; he awed the rabble rout, they did not lift a finger against him, they saw him dismount from his horse, and enter at the door where Black George's convulsed face gloomed for a moment, without interference.

Relieved of the phantom, they rallied, but only partially; and after a few idle, desultory shouts, they streamed out as they came, leaving but the blackened ashes of their trophies and the devastated terrace as a remembrance of popular retribution, in

which there was still something boyish and something craven.

One other adventure of the election, concerning the Bolton family, before we lay it aside.

During the great week, Sylvia had been debarred from entering Market Northorpe, and showing herself in the streets of the town; but when the contest was over, impelled by certain household and feminine necessities, pickles and spices, needles and thread, and the news from Joan Littlepage, whose anger at the family's disparagement was already allayed to Sylvia, the young girl took it upon her to venture, unauthorized, into the town one cloudy morning, to satisfy her wants and speed home like a lapwing.

Ill-luck would have it that Sir Charles had selected that very day to entertain his friends and allies high and low, throughout the borough.

The passengers were ten to one that Sylvia had expected; she dispatched her business hastily, and was traversing the High-street, when just before the Hathaway Arms, she got entangled among the people, elbowing their way for the purpose of hearing 'God save the King,' and 'The Roast Beef of Old England,' played lustily by a band of musicians in the inn yard.

Sylvia tried hard to extricate herself; but in her apprehension of attracting attention by too obvious a retreat, in sheer dread of what papa and mamma and the boys would say if she got into a scrape, she became wedged into nearly as formidable a muster as that which had land-locked the Gate-house.

It was not yet noon, and they were in holiday

dress, and holding a festival; but Sylvia was terribly abashed and dismayed when her neighbours recognised her, jostled her a little, uttered pithy comments on her person and connexions. They meant her no serious injury—they were Englishmen, and sober, unless with the glee of their coming treat; but their good-humour admitted the licence of a little rudeness; besides, they were not without suspicion that, somewhere in her vicinity, there must be concealing himself a more fitting foe than poor Miss Sylvia, as white as a lily, crushing her two hands together, and bending her head, begging humbly in faint accents, 'Will you let me pass? Oh! please will you make room?' and striving out her strength to push herself through channels every moment closing more hopelessly. One month ago, and three-fourths of the hands there would have been raised to salute Miss Sylvia Bolton—and still at the least approach to an outrage, as many sturdy arms would be stretched out to protect her; but after what she had seen, Sylvia did not understand this distinction, and there was grave danger of her falling down in a dead faint in the centre of the throng, and perhaps, in their very revulsion of feeling and willingness to aid her, being suffocated or trampled under foot in the High-street of her own little town of Market Northorpe, a poor accidental young martyr to political passions.

The air was ringing with 'Heyday, has the Squire sent a substitute?' 'Are you on the right side, my bonny lass?' 'Tut, there's no printer's ink on Dorothy Draggletail.' Squaring of elbows, tongues in the cheek lolling towards her—Sylvia looked

wildly round for protection, gasped for breath, staggered to keep her footing.

At the critical moment, an impetuous, indignant, half-hunting cry burst from a ground-floor window.

'Hark! down there; down—keep off the lady;' and Mr. Guy sprang out and rushed to the rescue.

Guy shot like an arrow to his aim, his active stalwart limbs driving aside all obstacles, his resentment vanishing before his success—perhaps before its object—for he looked around him with a smile and a frank merry claim on their sympathy.

'My good friends, thanks for an opportunity of being gallant; but you must let us out.'

Instantaneously a laugh—that humanizer of a mob—nay, a cheer for Mr. Guy.

Sylvia Bolton felt that she was safe, that some one was taking care of her; that these rude folks, the mechanics and labourers, and their families, whose faces she had known so well since she was a child, were drawing back from her with something of their old expression of respect, mingled now with shame. She did not think of the instrument, or care that Guy Hathaway was her guard, and stood behind her, with his arms round her, to shield her, and to force an outlet.

The moment they were clear, Guy freed her, and uncovered his head.

'I trust you have sustained no injury, madam; I believe I may say none was intended. But you must allow me to conduct you a little further—I implore you, madam—to the door of your house.'

Sylvia did not know how to answer him; indeed, she was trembling from head to foot. If she had looked

at her companion she would have seen that although he had undergone no panic, the hand which held his hat shook also, and his face was crimson. He did not wait for a formal answer; he took eagerly in his the little gloved fingers, and, as was the fashion, led her along. They were not more than a dozen yards from Mrs. Littlepage's shop, and there he stopped, and with the humblest bow that Sylvia had ever received, left her.

Sylvia was rather mystified at the readiness with which he selected her dear friend's house as a refuge for her in her present plight; but she was only too glad to curtsey her gratitude, and run into the sanctuary.

'Oh, Mrs. Littlepage, oh, Joan!—I've been in such affright.'

To be pitied and petted—for the occasion was too recent, and after all too untoward and precarious, for her to be rallied on her sufferings; and to have Mrs. Littlepage finding herself fully warranted in sending an express to the Gate-house to bring in the Squire, that he might carry home his naughty, belated daughter, in case greater mischief should befall her.

CHAPTER V.

SIR CHARLES HATHAWAY remained in undisturbed, and doubtless permanent possession of his seat on the Tory side of the House of Commons, where, if he lived, it is probable he lent his vote to every one of those taxes on which an

ungrateful posterity has reflected. *N'importe,* Market Northorpe was cherishing its favourite motto, 'Fear God; honour Sir Charles,' who was its king, and who like other kings was tempted to try on his vassals such doctrines as the divine right of kings, and the passive obedience of subjects. But Market Northorpe did not blot out the past, or forget that Squire Bolton had proved a renegade, and was but a Jacobin in disguise.

Let a man bear it as he will, it is not a genial process—this laying bare of single motives, and, as a consequence, establishing hostility between him and his kind. Squire Bolton might have been to blame in wearing the mask of a caustic, jesting tongue, so that no one suspected him of being in earnest in his strictures and condemnations—not in adhering to his convictions when put to the test; but the sharp, despotic, kindly old gentleman felt as acutely as a mere sentimentalist the loss of favour in his town. He said nothing about it, and he did his points, and had up his hairdresser more punctually than formerly; but he went down to his shop without relish, and he would no longer hunt because the pack belonged to Sir Charles, and he did not choose to be obliged to the man with whom the world said he had not kept faith.

The autumn winds were showering down the red and yellow leaves; the harvest-home was by; the Squire, who loved the customs of his fathers, had his pull at his own October, yet no judgment had descended upon his sins, no sure vengeance of his great adversary—save cooled regard and his own foreboding heart on a matter that was already an old story to his children.

They dwelt in happy ignorance, until one bright morning, when the hoar frost powdered the ruddy pippins and russet pears and the cosy stackyards about Market Northorpe, and lay white on the solitary angle of the ruined cathedral, and the square tower, and on garret roofs where many a burgher's child was reared in lusty, blithe, frost-bitten vigour —to the agitation of the whole town, a fine old house in the High-street, closed for many years,— a town house of the Hathaways when Market Northorpe was a winter residence of the neighbouring gentry, and had its West-End, its Mayfield-house, its Oakham-house, its Parnell-house—was re-opened; and lo! workmen from a distance proceeded to operate upon the dignified habitation, to run up a counter through the centre of the great dining-room with its painted panels and coat of arms on the ceiling, and presently a sign-painter mounted a ladder over against the high door with its stately coping, and proceeded to paint in elaborate but legible characters, the inscription, 'Hathaway's Printing-office.'

The secret was out; Sir Charles had turned tradesman, and was to out-Herod Herod—to undersell and ruin his ancient acquaintance Squire Bolton.

Every day brought fresh confirmation and fuller details; able printers from town; the prospectus of a new journal (Market Northorpe had been proud of its one county chronicle), to be supported by the Hathaway interest; all the novelties from Cave and Dodsley. Sir Charles was thus late in the day to enlighten and refine his constituency. Mr. Guy was to superintend the concern—Sir Charles would con-

vince them that he did not consider that his own flesh and blood demeaned itself by mixing in town business—and finally, the fulfilment of Squire Bolton's old scheme to build by the Lynn a paper-mill, which should afford labour and wages to all the idle and useless hands far and near.

Market Northorpe's exultation was unbounded. It congratulated itself and glorified Sir Charles—burying in a dark corner the conviction whose origin was neither dim nor distant, that Squire Bolton had mortally offended the liege lord, that he was therefore to be brought to poverty and trampled in the dust, and that they and their interests were to aid in the good cause.

And Squire Bolton merely said to his sons, when neither Mrs. Bolton nor Sylvia were of the audience, 'Now, lads, the blight's coming. I'll spend my last penny like a man; but see that you provide amongst you for the poor souls, the women, when I'm gone.'

Squire Bolton's shop was opposite, within a few paces of the other; and from the interior of the one you could survey the transactions of the rival, and almost count the money as it trickled into the till. Squire Bolton was now nailed to his board, whether under a sense of duty to ward off by his mere presence the decline impending over his family, or because he scorned to pull down his colours and shun the view of the powerful usurper and his unspeakable prosperity. What old shop can compete with a new one? and Sir Charles had wealth and liberality, and took care to do the thing handsomely, and to supply abundance of attractions—learned works for the

scholar; smart, thin, natty volumes, not so fine in silk, morocco, and gilding as seventy or eighty years afterwards, but fine enough for that generation; the most favourable terms to raw authors, ambitious to be in print, and backed by a subscription list and dedication to some mighty patron. Why, it was thought that Market Northorpe might terminate its career as a British Leipzic, and that the metropolitan booksellers had better look to their laurels, what with broad-sheets, and ballads, and dream-books, and weather-almanacs for the million, and such hearts and darts of charming valentines, in anticipation of February. Then arrived Mr. Guy, with his good breeding, his winning tongue—not very well satisfied to have this vocation thrust upon him in place of a commission in a marching regiment; sensible of the shock to his pretensions and the scurviness of Sir Charles to advance his enmity by suffering a kinsman to enter upon trade, but open to anything which was not positively degrading, like a capable young fellow, who was neither a coxcomb nor a Sir Sulk, but disposed to take the world as he found it, so preserving his ancestors' credit for easy tempers and contented constitutions. Squire Bolton stood with his back to his own shelves and saw it all, each irresistible bait, and scores of his best customers filing across the way to swallow it.

The Squire was not a man to pule and whimper over misfortune, but he was also hot at heart, and could not be altogether silent under his wrong, though he forbade his lads to retaliate. He was not so benign as the dear old Vicar, though he was honest and brave.

There was debateable land in which to encounter the townsmen. County meetings, justice courts, church-rate and municipal boards, these the Squire attended regularly, and expended on the proceedings such watchfulness and such irony that those who had been wont to value his oratory, learned to hold it in fear and detestation. This was not calculated to mend matters; moreover, the Squire and Mr. Guy came in each other's way in such quarters, and although Mr. Guy was neither quarrelsome nor overbearing, and had compunction and forbearance at the service of his opponent—when the strictures of the latter were directed with virulence and tolerable plainness against his patron, Sir Charles, it was not to be thought (the contrary would have been deemed false and base) that the young man would leave them altogether unanswered. So angry words passed between the old man and the young, their unequal years alone, perhaps, preventing them drawing their swords on each other. Bitter and prejudiced expressions made behind backs were retailed by third parties, until Squire Bolton knew that Mr. Guy Hathaway dubbed him a cantankerous Dunstable Noll Cromwell, and Mr. Guy was as well aware that in Squire Bolton's mouth he was but Sir Charles's puppy.

Yet into this acrimony the Squire could fling a little justice; for when Sylvia, the little fool, would treat in a girl's slighting way the personal obligation under which Mr. Guy had laid her at least in the family, and espouse her old father's cause very zealously—as what good girl would desert the paternal standard for that hoisted by a likely young

man such as Mr. Guy?—when Sylvia put up her lip in great disgust at some low scandal as to how Mr. Guy played quoits with his men, or invited them all to the 'Hathaway Arms' on Sir Charles's birthday to toast their undertaking, or kissed Lucy Wyatt when she served him with his jug of claret on the same memorable occasion,—

'And where's the mighty harm done?' challenged the Squire, turning upon the informant. 'If the worst that we can tell of each other is a game, a toast, or a kiss to a red-cheeked lass, we are wonderfully clean-handed, say I. Gad, if the boy commits no greater crime, he'll have little enough to answer for. There, Ned, no snivelling; don't he go to church like a Christian? Of course, the bottle and the girls don't become your cloth, though they've often enough consoled it, else mighty lies are circulated. And I'll tell you what, Sylly, if you mean to play the prude and hold up your hands at such motes in a fellow's eye, you'd better get along with you to France at Sam's tail, and enter a nunnery at once.'

Sylvia had not a call to testify her rigid virtue for weeks, until she met Mr. Guy Hathaway at a huge tea party at the Parnell's, where all the eligibles of Market Northorpe and its vicinity were formally gathered, feuds or no feuds.

Tea-drinkings were then the festivities; heavy dinners and French breakfasts, in a manner, were not. High and low, learned and simple, sipped the refreshing beverage. Dr. Johnson wrote a paper to confute certain shameful aspersions and insinuations directed against the unparalleled shrub by venomous

calumniators (thorough topers, doubtless), for which it was thought the East India Company, in the absence of the Emperor of China, ought to have voted him a pension. Young King George and Charlotte of Mecklenburgh-Strelitz reckoned it a sufficient stimulant for their domestic Court. Dr. Burney and Sir Joshua Reynolds dispensed it royally to the *élite* of London rank and intellect. Tea and *The Traveller*, and a few country dances, were ample, rational and cheerful diversions with which to entertain a company who had journeyed many miles and surmounted arduous toilets—satin breeches and pomatumed queues, flowered silver suits and gold solitaires—singular extremes in the same generation, dissipation and temperance, lavishness and frugality, meeting and mingling.

At the Parnell's the first two acts were over, the tea and cakes had been handed round, the ladies devotedly waited on by the lords; *The Traveller* had tried the aspirants to wit and learning and the prosy pedants, while the rare performers of the grand tour (it was a grand tour in the last century) had puzzled and piqued the majority. The country dances were forming—the inimitable *Coquettes* and *Triumphs*—when Harry Parnell penetrated a group of young ladies, and presented Mr. Guy Hathaway to Miss Bolton.

Sylvia was sitting, not so very splendid, but in the delicate richness of a peach-blossom lutestring, with her mother's pearls in her auburn hair. She was very much surprised, and if she did not 'snap her fan in his face,' and so make the powder 'fly from his hair,' she held up her head and rose stiffly, extending

the very tips of her rosy fingers to the presumptuous man. Mr. Guy did blush over her name and look unaccountably put out, until the blundering fellow, in spite of his manners, let out, half in protest, half in apology, that he had been labouring under a ridiculous misconception with regard to her and Joan Littlepage. He had heard their names coupled together, the first time he saw them, he had seen them several times together afterwards, and he had fallen into the delusion that Sylvia Bolton was Joan Littlepage, and Joan Littlepage Sylvia Bolton. Then when he begged Harry Parnell to introduce him to the beauty—'why, the young lady with the pearls, next the card-table,' for some foolishness caused her supposed name to stick in Guy's throat—to his confusion he discovered himself bowing and stammering before the daughter of Squire Bolton.

If Mr. Guy had been minded to steal near in the dusk with Sir Charles's chariot and six, for the purpose of waylaying and carrying off his fancy, it would have been an awkward mistake truly ! !

There was no help for it; Mr. Guy and Miss Sylvia must accomplish their sets to the edification of the onlookers; and as a reward for decorum, and a dawn after darkness, Guy's inclination to shrug his shoulders ceased, his longing that the dance should be ended suddenly expired. He began to look into the sweetest pair of eyes in the world, and to linger over his partner's hand, as if no hallucination had matched them. It was 'plaguy vexatious' that Sylvia Bolton should be herself, and not another; but neither he, nor she was to blame, nor

in this instance her father either; and for anything farther he would not think of it.

It did not disturb Guy's magnanimity that Sylvia was as distant as a queen; for if he was not impudent, neither was he exacting and lofty, but manly and sweet-tempered, inclined to make so much of Sylvia and so little of himself, that her pride and reserve neither hurt, nor repelled him. For the same reason he was not offended when, the dance over, Sylvia with a hasty curtsey hurried to place herself beside Sam, who stood prepared to extend to her his protection. 'Their Sylly should not be laughed at by an insolent fop.' But Sam Bolton had too much of the old Squire's candour and uprightness in him to be a regular bully; so while in his father's stead he put an instant stop to what he regarded as unbecoming philandering, he had the sense and decency not to pick a quarrel with their enemy; not to soil his young sister's reputation, and prick a man through the heart or lungs, for the ostensible trifle of 'down the middle and up again,' and an interchange of salutations.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Christmas was at hand: the waits, the Yule logs, the solemn worship, the family festivals.

Squire Bolton's grizzled hair was rapidly blanching into a semblance of the winter's snow; Madam Bolton cried oftener now with nervous weakness than with perverseness and passion;

Black George had been offered his last wages and an honourable dismissal, and had fallen upon his knees and sworn that he would never vex Madam more, and seek no other reward than his bite and sup, so be it the Squire would but retain him to dig the garden, to feed the hogs and cattle; Ned talked of going into lodgings and living on his curate's salary; and Sam had a notion of seeing the world and visiting his father's brother, a retired sea-captain, who had known the Spanish Main, and acquiring a taste for foreign countries, had settled in France; but patriotism or his elder son's rights fettered Sam, for while he planned and projected at odd moments, he was still following the plough, lending a hand to pile the fagots, standing on the barn floor, setting traps for vermin, or smoking with his father in the twilight gloom of the Walnut Parlour.

Mark came over according to custom, and said nothing more than if the Hathaway printing-office which was flaming away in the town yonder, and not only melting a man's coins but his credit also in the same blaze, had not existed; but he returned to his school and forwarded to his father inclosures, at which the Squire poohed with moistened eyes—yet when he refused them indignantly, Mark waved them back again with such a simple, sincere, 'They're nothing to me, sir,' that his father, gazing wistfully at him, deigned to accept from his hopeless hand what he would not have stooped to receive from any other.

'It may do him good, who knows? It may relieve his own trouble if he remembers the circum-

stance an hour after it has occurred. Sally must have a portion of right on her side; there must be causes and effects in nature of which I don't dream, or that poor boy should have been touched by the King, or blessed by the pastor, or had rue or elm stitched into his swaddling clothes, although it had come to no more than God help him!—God help him!'

Even Sylvia drooped, and went thinking instead of singing about her numerous duties, for it was evident to the youngest and shallowest that the old shop at Market Northorpe would soon be kept open only for shame's sake; the old *Market Northorpe Chronicle* would scarcely pay its expenses, while swarm upon swarm of the new *Hathaway Gazette* flew across the country—and the burdened acres of the Gate-house could no more support the Boltons than they could maintain the Government.

The Hathaway print-shop was in full bloom, flaunting its intoxicating success. Every fresh day the click of the masons on the rising walls of the paper-mill resounded pleasantly in the air; and when Mr. Guy was not in boots and tops, knee deep in ditch-water and clay, his good horse striding hard upon Puss, he was moving lightly among the workmen, trying this mallet and that chisel as he proved the types and rollers, and acquiring with extraordinary facility even manual knowledge and skill in his temporary employment.

Squire Bolton observed him, and his last hold cracked.

'Sir Charles may die, his life is none of the best; but my failure will survive in that lad. He has the

knack that neither Sam, nor Mark, nor Ned could acquire, though they sought it with their heart's blood; only little Sylly has something of it—the power of construction. Notwithstanding his Hathaway name and his nurture, he is a born mechanic; and although he spends wildly, he is not without a head for accounts, and method and order. I should not wonder if he grew far-sighted and intelligent. He will progress and put his foot on the top of Market Northorpe yet; the puppy become the bull-dog, and bay loudly enough, I warrant, when the entire town is his kennel. Ay, ay; we must push our fortunes elsewhere, or sink into yeomen again, as some great-great-grandfather mun have been, if not worse—robber or cut-throat. Up and down is the see-saw of life. The Gate-house and the two parlours and the clipped hedges have been ours now for a century and a half—time maybe they should pass into other hands, and strangers have the use of them, as we have had.'

It might be in accordance with this conclusion that there were at last symptoms of the Squire's dauntless bearing bending with his adversity. A moody slovenliness, sadly different from his old rusticity, crept over him; he either avoided Market Northorpe altogether, or dived into the tavern where Sam took his pleasure, as often as he entered the town. At home he grew heavy and lazy; he, who had been so brisk and active, and sat hours soaking himself with his pipe and his liquor, till Sylvia was frightened to move or speak, lest she should arouse him and provoke his moroseness. The Squire's palmy days were over, his decline speedy and sure.

Verily, he had soon eaten the bitter fruits of his actions.

Mrs. Bolton came daily into the parlour, though it was only to bid Sylvia chafe her hands, or rub her feet, or pour her out for pity a little glass of raspberry and noyeau.

'Sure, Sylvie, the wind's in the east. Oh, Lud! my cap is awry. I'm not fit to be seen. To think how proud I once was of my poor face, that will soon go to feed the worms. Child, be humble. Sir Charles styled me the nymph of the Lynn; little did I guess that any friend of mine would insult him. Oh dear! oh dear!'

'Insult him, lovey, you insult yourself by the suggestion,' answered the Squire, stirring himself up, but generally he paid less heed to his wife's absurdities, and had less care for her bodily infirmities. They sat together in apathetic estrangement, a thousand times more depressing than their former squabbles. Mrs. Bolton missed the cross, and did not take well with its withdrawal.

'Your father don't twit me as he used to do, Sylvie. I think he is breaking up, poor man; he is so gross he ought to have himself blooded, but he wont take my advice. He'll be dropping off one of these days, and the Gate-house will be so lonesome. A different sight of a place from what it was when I first came out to pick strawberries, and would have a pet lamb tethered in the garden. Mr. Bolton tried to persuade me I might have scores in the fields, and that it would get loose and nibble the fruit trees, besides enlarging into a sheep before I knew what I was about; and so it did, and soiled

my gown, and butted me, the nasty beast, but I never told him to have it butchered—he was always hard and violent, was your father.'

Sylvia bore a large share of the family burden; and when she had to coax and soothe both parents, and after the correct addition and neat ciphering of the house bills, began to be scared at their amount; when she became responsible for the expense as well as the excellence of her dishes; when Sam, and even Ned, coming in harassed and tired, found fault with this and that, and required unattainable perfection in every arrangement—bread always light and sweet, candles that should neither sputter nor peak, and endless cups of creditable tea,—it is a marvel how the child could compass her cares. But she was young, healthy, and hopeful, and she now and then ran into her dear friends the Littlepages, and was merry and thoughtless for an hour or two, returning faithfully to sober down to her duties, and discharge them the better for the brief relaxation.

It was good of Sam and Ned that they were always willing to aecompany Sylvia to Market Northorpe, and attend her home; she looked for it in Ned, but she did think it considerate of Sam, and if he would have allowed her, she would have put her arms round his neck and kissed his rough-bearded face twice over for the condescension.

On such a desirable holiday in this pale, cold February, Sylvia slipped off her domestic anxieties, tucked up her maroon skirt, and started for Market Northorpe, leaving a message for one of the boys (Sylvia fell into natural mimicry of the elders' discourse, using terms which sat with quaint old-

fashioned grace on her red lips), to follow her at their convenience.

Sylvia found Joan very much engrossed with her needlework at the little round table, so occupied that she could spare only a few short words to her friend, and stooping her head so assiduously over her pattern that Sylvia could not so much as get a glimpse of her face.

It was the first time that Sylvia had suspected Joan of the vapours, but to be sure she was full of turns and tricks, so Sylvia sat down patiently, just to balk her in her fun, and diverted herself by looking through the door, slightly ajar, at Granny presiding in her arm-chair, and the open street beyond, where the click of the passengers' pattens to a female inhabitant of the Gate-house was rather enlivening than monotonous.

Suddenly Joan started up with a burst of laughter, and closed the door of communication with the shop. Sylvia was ready to be amused but not amazed, until Joan threw open a leaf of one of the great brown clothes-presses that lined the room, and out of that odd lurking-place stepped reluctantly, coughing and scarlet, her own brother Sam.

'Good Heavens, Sam! what are you doing here? What brought you before me? Why are you hiding?'

Sam coughed again, and Joan laughed, till she held her sides, at both—the discomfited swain and the big eyes of the eager little sister.

'Must I save the poor man's blushes? How he does blush, my dear; would you have believed it of a fellow like a trooper? Oh, mercy, Sam! don't

frown, or I'll be off again, as sure as I'm alive; I can't stand any more of it; I'll have an ache in my side for a fortnight. You must know, Sylvie, that Master Sam gives us his custom in socks and soap-balls, and he has a bad habit of walking right through the shop into our great drawing-room here, costing your humble servant a mint of precious time and talk. Now don't blab, Sylvia, to your mother or Black George, or I'll poison you. But Granny don't much approve of his company, unless when he is tacked to your sleeve, for she says that we don't mean anything serious, and we don't—don't we, Sam?—and two young things often spoil their markets by such foolish intimacies. Thus, when Mr. Sam chose to be rebellious and to offer me a bad example, by climbing the wall and entering through the garden door—not to have him properly punished, nor to vex the old lady needlessly, I was so good-natured as to draw the door almost close, so that the most suspicious soul could guess nothing, and we always spoke low, though for that matter Granny and Bell are as deaf as posts, and when a foot approached, whisk he went among the yarns and the towelling—his two heels have been as good as a farce many an afternoon, and Bell will think the print of his big feet the track of Old Nick himself. It has been famous sport, but it must have ended some day, and therefore Sylvie you have played the part of the incensed guardian or the choleric father a deal better than old Granny, who has asthma, and would be for forgiving us and giving us her blessing, and making us happy, as a punishment. Now, Sam, be off once for all, and don't venture

here again, sir, or I'll call in the constable. There's Granny moving to come and chat with Sylvie on the incidents of the last fifty years. Do you hear, sir, or do you suppose she'll credit that Sylvie carried you over the threshold in her pocket?'

The convicted Sam vanished, and Sylvia was mistress of a secret, though Joan still would have it that it was all a frolic, and when Ned presented himself at six o'clock to fetch Sylvia home, he was as sighing and demure, and Joan as teasing and triumphant as ever.

Sylvia had been aware these hundred years that Ned dangled after Joan Littlepage, and got mocked for his pains; but that Sam too was smitten through his bristling buckler was another chapter in the story.

Sylvia was very sage upon the matter, and deprecated and censured with proper spirit, though it was her dear friend and her pair of brothers who were the parties concerned. It was idle of Joan, ill-doing; she might have much vivacity and numerous admirers, and be tempted; ah me! she had not the troubles which Sylvia knew of to keep her steady. Joan would experience them soon, for how could Sam maintain a wife without that sojourn in France that might win his uncle to bequeath to him those broad-pieces, one or two of which Sylvia had seen in her father's hands, and time and distance were trials to lovers. But to set the poor boys against each other; she hoped no harm would come of it—and, as if the maiden had not enough anxieties, an entirely new and marvellously comprehensive list was added to the sum total of her cares.

Surely Ned would not break his heart; he would only play doleful airs on the flute, and write verses, as she had once caught him doing, but Sam had carried off the paper to wrap round his fishing-bait. Oh! surely Ned, who preached against wickedness, would never be driven to wicked words and deeds. Sylvia quaked at the idea, and it smote her to see him come in from perpetual peregrinations to Market Northorpe to parley with his clerk or ringers, or this or that ratepayer or pauper parishioner, always smirking and conscious, as if to say that he had taken occasion to bestow ghostly counsel on Granny Littlepage, and had been rewarded by the arch looks and blithe retorts of her charming grand-daughter.

Simple Sylvia was thunderstruck when Ned, at last, in family conclave, with a good deal of affectation, but not without a flush of genuine pride and happiness, announced seriously his formal engagement to Joan Littlepage.

Sylvia could hardly refrain starting up to explain that it was a vain prepossession, a cruel and malicious deceit, when she saw for a moment Sam's grey face and clenched jaw. Ned went maundering on, apologizing for his matrimonial intentions in the unpropitious circumstances of the family, but an alliance with so highly endowed and virtuous a lady as Miss Littlepage had long been his most fondly cherished vision. The proposed change in his situation by a removal into Market Northorpe lodgings, had brought the affair to a crisis. He had, with due deference to his father's consent, taken it upon him to sound the feelings of his

charmer and her venerable protector towards him, and he was honoured and blessed in communicating to them their favourable and flattering nature. He might say his hand was conditionally accepted—conditionally, of course, on his excellent father and mother's approval of his choice.

Now the absurdity and incongruity of this step did not consist in a wedding under difficulties, or in Joan Littlepage's madly agreeing to share Ned Bolton's lodgings, and starve upon his slender curate's means. People married then in all circumstances, and on nothing, and not only did not starve, but fared none the worse in the end. It was ordained that young people should go together, and be yoked betimes in the holy bonds of wedlock; and they did so in perfect faith, the match being a notably bad one that met with severe or prolonged opposition. Not a connexion of this contracting couple ventured to stigmatize Ned as grossly selfish, or Joan as recklessly imprudent. The worldly aspect of the case was not the difficulty here. Joan was willing, Madam Littlepage was radiantly acquiescent, Squire Bolton and his partner were submissive—but what vehement objections were those boiling in the hearts of Sylvia and Sam. They made no sign; they would not come forward and forbid Ned's banns; they were as silent as the grave to each other: nay, at Sam's hoarse felicitations, and during the next week or two when he stalked out and in, and whistled to his dogs as he was wont, Sylvia could have believed that eyes and ears had played her false. Could? Would that she could. No, no: she was sick and sorry for Sam, sorry for

Ned, sorry for Joan Littlepage herself. Time might smooth many a jagged edge of folly and unkindness, but Joan Littlepage would be her dear friend no more—not although Sylvia walked expressly into Market Northorpe, to kiss the cheek of her intended sister.

And yet Sylvia caught herself pitying Joan most of all, in her boisterous gaiety, in her rapid asseverations.

'It is quite true, Sylvie. I'm going to be a parson's wife, and give my goodman more sins of his wife's to weep for than the iniquities of the congregation will balance. I'm only afeared Ned will hang himself before the year is out.' And in the rapid revulsion to the passionate private confession,—'I must have had a mild, quiet man, Sylvie; I dared not have done otherwise; I would have gone to destruction. It is all very well to quarrel and fling off, and make up again with a sweetheart, but granny has spoilt me, and I could not have brought myself to bear the commands and curses of the wedded wife. I would have turned rebel, fury, devil! you don't know me, Sylvie. Then, even if poor Sam and I had been saints, he could not keep me these score of years without robbing your father. I always looked forward to some meek, good body's having mercy upon me, for if granny and Bell were taken away, it would be mortal dismal. I only meant to have a little diversion. Forgive me, Sylvie, and don't fear for Ned; I will be grateful to him till the day of my death. I know we'll suit. Yes, I'm acting wisely, and granny's satisfied; and don't you give me up,

Sylvie; only say you'll not give me up. Remember a strong will to commence leaves no will to finish our fate.'

'A strong will to begin,' to pluck the hand out of our bosom and thrust it into the glowing fire, 'leaves no will to finish our fate.' Was that true? Was that why Sam Bolton, in the middle of Madam Littlepage's glorious preparations for an important event, and after sundry fierce, fitful applications to husbandry and field-sports, suddenly announced his irrevocable intention of starting instantly to join his absent kinsman. Pleas of ceremony were powerless with Sam, and possibly the sooner he went the better —to summon back alienated affections, and establish the claims of blood in the heart and hearth grafted upon another race and another land. So the Boltons speeded their parting son, as they wished well to their marrying one; and as Sylvia was helping to stock his valise, Sam tossed her a set of ivory tablets, —'There, child, these are not ample enough for Ned's wife:' that was the sole admission of his heart's bitterness.

Sam departed, and Joan Littlepage took to bed three days with a face-ache, and got up at the end of that space to enter more eagerly than ever into the interest of the month; wild to have the horrid business over, and she and Ned settled down into an old married couple, because blushes and vows, and fallings on one's knees, and thefts of a lock of hair or a riband, were silly, silly things—she was weary of them.

After a reasonable interval came curt, terse letters from Sam to his father, beginning 'Honoured Sir,'

and proceeding in his decided style to testify that foreign places were not so bad as they were called, foreign persons a deal honester than many a he and she in England. He was in a fair way to be reconciled to them; and he had made plenty of acquaintances; and had, if he liked to take them, a power of amusements. Above all, his uncle was friendly, and disposed to put up with his company—so no more at present. But be easy on his account: he would do for himself without troubling the Gate-house, no offence intended, and he hoped they would preserve the poor old acres.

When Sam Bolton returned to Market Northorpe, the old folk had passed away, the young were middle-aged, and he himself a stern, dignified, grey-headed man.

Many a time in the interval did Sylvia's affectionate heart yearn after the exiled brother; in many a quiet hour—for women at their happiest are pensive, romantic souls—did Sylvia ponder how the strong was beaten, and he who was preferred resigned; and after all, by what glamour Sam garnered his love where his brother Ned held the key.

Long before there was repose for these dreams, one fresh April morning, Ned Bolton and Joan Littlepage, bride and bridegroom, rode off on one horse, all alone, without an attendant, to be joined until death in the next parish church; to stroll in the fields yellow with cowslips, eat an early dinner, a capon, and curds and cream, and jog home to the humble, snug apartments within a stone's-throw of Ned's church, where the parishioners sent their gifts, where Ned penned his homilies and studied

the Fathers, and where Joan mended his stockings and stored his cupboards, ruling with a high but not ungenerous hand.

Sylvia's initiation into family marriages, in spite of the novelty of Ned's young establishment and Granny Littlepage's frenzy to do it justice, and the appropriate town and country festivities, was not so sweet a morsel that she should be haunted with the future spouses of indifferent people. It was hard to be plagued with disagreeable riddles which did not concern her; but Market Northorpe had taken up Mr. Guy Hathaway's want of a wife, and bandied the subject, and tore it to pieces, and revived it again in greater vigour than before, until it became a standing butt for rumours, guesses, and declarations, as good as Queen Mary's innocence, and the authorship of *Junius's Letters* to any debating club.

For her part, Sylvia did not see what call Mr. Guy Hathaway had for a partner beyond other young gentlemen; certainly no one asked her opinion on the demand for the raw material, only they worried her with stories of Mr. Guy's housekeeping in the Park Cottage with Patty Ford—half-witted Patty, silly, but the cleanliest and tidiest of poor smitten maidens; and sure Patty would never be stinted in her purse! and yet they said Mr. Guy was not like young Myres, nor Staines the hairdresser's son, but was the easiest served gentleman in the world, carried out his own cutlets, and when Patty was oblivious of cookery, dined off bread-and-cheese as merry as a kid. It was an old promise that Patty should be his housekeeper; but while in ecstasy at the realization of her ambition, so purely did she worship Mr.

Guy that she would fain have supplied him with the fairest, fondest, best young lady in the county for a Madam Hathaway, though she herself should be forthwith dethroned and cast aside.

Mr. Guy laughed out gracefully enough at Patty's well-known ambition; and at the violets, pinks, and daffodils which she forced upon him to grace his condition.

When Patty had a young man, he always 'went to be uncommon smart.' Lovers and flowers were pat to each other. She could not tell why, but everybody knew it—see if he did not find it so—and she would pray powerfully for his success.

Once, when Sylvia was certain that Guy Hathaway was absent, she walked slowly past the Park Cottage, and Patty ran out to give her greeting.

Sylvia Bolton was well acquainted with the stout, comely, sweet, vague-eyed presence, and the spotless, fidgety neatness of cap and kerchief.

Innumerable daisy-chains and cowslip-balls the gardener's daughter had strung for Sylvia long ago; and twin peaches from the Hall gardens, and clusters of nuts from the green lane, Patty had conveyed to the Gate-house at the oddest of times and seasons.

Sylvia was bound to chat a little to her, though she resolutely refused to enter the little wicket. In the course of the rambling, cordial conversation, Sylvia had time to mark the sunshiny change on the mouldering cottage, where Mr. Guy pruned and nailed, and Patty swept and scoured; the green vine, planted to rise like Jonah's gourd and envelop the blighted jessamine; the blossoming boughs of the cherry-tree drawn away from the bright casement;

the dank sorrel leaves and dusty nettles rooted out from the paling. Sylvia closed her eyes, and saw it, with the morning dew like diamonds on the rustling leaves close by, and lying like silver in the Park hollow; or when the evening song of the blackbird was replying to the soft notes of Mr. Guy's flageolet, which he played, according to Market Northorpe, not in the squeaking fashion in which Ned Bolton tortured the flute, but with a fall rich, mellow, and free, as 'profoundly' as his Majesty's head organist —or to try that vagary of Market Northorpe—in the broad, cheery afternoon light, with a young woman's face at the twined-about casement, through which the ruddy house-fire gleamed when the world was brown and sere without, watching for the erect figure and the buoyant step of the young master. Dangerous little imaginary excursions into private property, these thick-coming fancies for Mistress Sylvia; but she shook them out of her head, imagined them cast to the winds, and went, like a brave little woman, on her thorny way.

The next time Sylvia Bolton had any intercourse with Mr. Guy was in a friend's house in the town, where he called upon her fresh-fallen footsteps, and accepted an invitation from the family to remain for an hour; though Miss Sylvia sat apart, silent, and averse to make one in the general discussions. After an assiduous court to the whole party, on the entrance of other guests Guy Hathaway got close to Miss Sylvia's chair, and addressed her particularly with some random speech on the season, and the forwardness of plants and trees; then took it upon him to offer her a great red daisy which he held in

his hand, wishing ardently that it had been a rose, or a sprig of myrtle, or a heartsease at least.

There was no uncompromising Sam to interpose between them—so shyly, and with crimsoning cheeks, Sylvia took the homely flower under a cross-fire of observant eyes.

But what man of gallantry presented a lady even with a tulip, or a lupin then, without an accompanying copy of verses? So hastily pulling out his pencil and tearing out a leaf from his memorandum-book, Guy wrote from memory two couplets—something blending charms and blossoms, fading and dying, perfume and good deeds, and ending with a modest hope that the maid would take a lesson from the flower, remember betimes that she too would fade, be not haughty, nor idly procrastinate with her destiny.

It was so stale, with such a watery imitation of Herrick, and just such a split hair of appropriateness as may be found in similar complimentary effusions; but Guy, a tasteful fellow of the day, thought it all right, and stripped of the least suspicion of forward passion, by stating manfully that he never 'writ' verses on his own account, but as she had deigned to accept his poor daisy, he hoped she would grace him farther by throwing her eyes over these lines of a better man's penning—they had occurred to him as a trifle permitted by, and befitting the occasion.

Now was Sylvia's time to display her discretion, and she would have strangled herself in the way of duty to do the Gate-house credit. She answered, tremulously but coldly, in the ordeal of the unanimous pause, that she also 'writ' no poetry, she did not doubt that the lines were elegant, but she did

not pretend to judge them; and so, with the unopened paper falling loosely on her lap, and her fingers pulling to pieces the pied petals, looked up as she finished to meet Guy's grave, reproachful eyes, and to feel that it is difficult for a guileless bird to inflict pain on another, and remain itself unscathed.

Once in her chamber at the Gate-house, shut up for the night, alone under the evening star, Sylvia stealthily produced and unfolded a crumpled paper, and devoured the shallow fantastic rhymes. They were so sweetly turned, had been so prettily given, and they were the first she had had, the very first. The foolish lass cried over them for a few minutes before she enclosed them safely with her shuttle in her tatting-box, and then, like a wise woman, who would deceive herself first of all, she began to sing, and to fold up the various articles strewn about, and to wonder what sort of weather they would find for the great wash to-morrow.

CHAPTER VII.

FEMALE serenity and reticence were highly prized, and even insisted upon by the censors of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Those lovely damsels in hoops and tight sleeves, and ribbon bands round their round throats, how cool they were —how careless! Each was taught never to flinch or falter, to vow a determination to a single life, to own no tenderness for mortal man, however he pursued her, and swore and threatened, and took his own life to spite the vestal beauty; to allow the man

she married to suppose her become his in deference to the wishes of her friends, in submission to lawful authority, in consideration of the world's opinion, in an impartial calculation of his comparative freedom from vile practices and possession of trustworthy qualities, in very weariness of his importunity—but never to be weak enough to admit one spark of private preference for the hero.

It was satisfactory but difficult, built upon perpetual self-control, or consummate selfishness, or hard steeling to natural impulses. Sylvia had now to fight desperately, because though her father and Mr. Guy were rivals and acknowledged foes, and although it was absurd to call him her lover, as Joan did (the man had not spoken to her above half-a-dozen sentences in his life, and she should like to see him try it), Mr. Guy's behaviour became confirmed in its alarming and aggressive pantomime. He would see Sylvia at church, and on every public occasion; and would appear as if he had been studying, or reversing rare Ben Jonson's petition,

> Drink to me only with thine eyes,
> And I will pledge with mine;

as if he cared very little who marked his incessant toast.

Sylvia was in terrible apprehension of her father's becoming aware of the foolish fact, which was no secret at Market Northorpe — and impunity only rendered Mr. Guy more heedless and bolder; for that last night at the theatre, when he was sitting in front with Ambrose Price, and they were playing that Italian story of *Romeo and Juliet*, carried away

by the poetry and acting, he turned and gave her such flashes of appeal, such impetuous, imperious looks, which seemed to say, 'You see what others have said and done,' that Sylvia was in a wild palpitation of sheer consternation.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was market-day at Market Northorpe; there were the farmers in their long great-coats, their wives and daughters in cloaks and hoods—the Goodies and Sues of these Gaffers and Gileses; and there was a man drawing about a box, and calling upon the country folks to pay their pence, and see the bones of a shark that had devoured three men and a boy—a boat's crew in the South Seas; and a scarred sailor, baring the ghastly stump of an arm, and vociferating lustily how, in the darkness of midnight, he had climbed the Heights of Abraham, where great General Wolfe received his death wound. Squire Bolton was there, covertly shunned by his fellows, hurrying along, haggard and oppressed, for, hark in your ear! a new crash was impending, Squire Bolton had information that a Secretary of State's warrant was about to be issued against him, on a charge of seditious passages in his paper, formerly the least suspected and most harmless of local registers. The crime might not be so weighty as that of Wilkes, it might be nearer the later midge's bite of 'the fat Adonis;' but a little humour and a little gall were materials enough, under the influence which caused the Squire to grind his teeth in impotent rage at his

mighty and implacable persecutor. The accusation was alarming, and the old Squire, scenting the keen cutting breath that blew it, felt his spirit cowed at the prospect of captivity, granting that he was promoted to the dignity of the Tower, in exchange for his fields and gardens.

The summer sunshine lay upon the town, adding its gleams and shadows to antique facing, grotesque balustrade, steep gable, bits of garden ground, and draw-wells turning up green and cool, in the market-place and thoroughfare. Time's greyness was on Market Northorpe, but the sweet pure light pervaded it, and glinted over it like the righteousness which transforms the hoary head into a crown of glory.

Hot, dusty, and parched, a groom galloped up to the 'Hathaway Arms.' The man wore Sir Charles's livery, and was a native of the place, and when he did not dismount, but conferred apart with the landlord, there was a rush to greet him and to learn the news.

Suddenly there arose a murmur in the market, which spread like lightning, so that within an hour Mrs. Littlepage's yard-measure dropped from her fingers; and Madam Bolton, out at the Gate-house, had her laces cut in a swoon. Was another election pending?—had Sir Charles at last taken to himself a bride, and was this the *avant-courier* preceding them at all the stages? Nay; Sir Charles had accepted another mate, and lay—pinched, white, and stiff, in his satin-lined coffin, in his rooms at Kensington. Could it be that Sir Charles Hathaway, of Hathaway Hall, was but a bit of clay?—

that he had gone where powder and plush, lace, velvet, and gold, could not follow?—that he was entering Hades stripped and defenceless, like any ordinary man!

No wonder Market Northorpe stood aghast; for what security to life and property was there when the head was thus suddenly struck down? The bell was set to toll on the instant, the shutters were put up on the chief shops—those which enjoyed the Hall custom; quite a sympathizing crowd gathered to watch Mr. Guy hurrying off in a post-chaise to London.

The feeling might be more that of a shock than a pang, but it was universal. Squire Bolton felt it with the rest; for if the unexpected death of a friend thrills and softens, that of a deadly foe chills and appals.

Since Sir Charles was dead, the only thing left for him here below was to be buried as befitted his station; that is, with a style, ceremony, and boundless expense which should impoverish his heirs, remove him to the last from the common herd, and cause the toddling round-eyed children to boast to the age of three-score years and ten that they remembered the great doings at the burial of Sir Charles Hathaway of the Hall.

The inhabitants of Market Northorpe were doomed to be speedily sensible of a new reign. The heir, long estranged, had frequented the Hall in his youth, and had been implicated in the violent death whose red stain yet rested in the secret conscience of the world on those stately deserted chambers. He had been wild and unfortunate afterwards, and it was

said had applied in one memorable case to Sir Charles for help which might have saved him from disgrace and a great sorrow, but the claim was denied, and the kinsmen never met again. This Hathaway was long beyond the need of aid, having succeeded in direct inheritance to extensive estates in his own county, so that there was less probability that this last prosperity would mellow his nature. Moreover, such associations as he had with Market Northorpe being of remote standing, when he came down with the body in strict privacy, and buried it, disaffected folk said, like a dog—no better than some half-pay captain or retired tradesman, the only person connected with the town for whom he sent specially, and with whom he held a personal colloquy, was his ancient acquaintance, Squire Bolton.

Yes, the world was changed at Hathaway Hall. No issue of mourning cloaks, and crape bands, and sable plumes; no open house, no doles to the poor; and if there were baked meats and wines on the return from the family vault, and a carouse to conclude the night, it was confined to the chief mourners. It was actually spread abroad that some of the few decorums were supplied on Mr. Guy's express responsibility and at his expense.

The grief of Market Northorpe was swallowed up in ire; the faithful town, burning under its wrongs, was ripe for revolt. If the new man had not departed immediately, he might have been stoned, or shot at, or had a burning brand cast into the old Hall, in which they had placed their pride,—for there is no hatred like that whose root is an old love.

Yet if Market Northorpe could have looked with

cleared eyes into the gloomy coach, and read the moody, fierce occupant, the hard riding and hard drinking, sole relics of his gay youth, written legibly in the weather-stained, bloated face, and followed him home—that grand independent northern home on which they reflected so rancorously—and seen its mistress, whose malady he had wedded deliberately along with her accursed riches and lands, mastered by his brute force in her mad fits—and reviewed his untrained, demoralized children, with their ungovernable passions and tainted blood, Market Northorpe might have held its peace, its petty anger quenched in the spectacle of such guilt and misery.

It was not only that the old title was extinct, and the supremacy over them devolved on a hostile stranger, but they were in a manner orphaned and anchorless, with no accredited authority to refer to, no sceptre under whose shadow they could repose. They were mulcted of their banner, their rallying cry, their spell; and as men are apt to become peevish and quarrelsome under losses—and they could not reasonably reproach the late Sir Charles with this calamity — they fell to casting stones at their favourite, Mr. Guy. It is painful to record it, but they looked coldly on him because he was no longer the ward and official of their great man, and because he had not contrived in a few interviews to propitiate and win the confidence of Sir Charles's successor, so as to stand still in the same relation to all parties. They believed that his awkwardness and wrongheadedness had done them an injustice. They even began, in their wavering, to discover that they had been led into over-niceness

and severity of judgment, and so had forsaken and vilified one who had been their friend long ago, and who might do them a good turn again. It is a relief to look away from such instability and querulousness to Squire Bolton breasting the reflux of the tide stolidly, sarcastically, but holding up his head—as who would not?—at the lightening of such a back-breaking burden.

Thus Market Northorpe thought and spoke, when they little guessed how much more closely the death of their master would touch the town, what peculiar cause they should have to mourn the love and hate alike perished. While Mr. Guy walked about silent and mournful, Market Northorpe was apprized that they might rue the day when he first set his man's foot on their pavement, and stole so swiftly into their best graces—for disastrous to more than one sufferer is an enterprise started vigorously, expedited strenuously, and arrested fatally.

Not Mr. Guy alone was now interested in the Hathaway office and mill, or yet Sir Charles's heir, but so were the workmen collected, established, and started in a fresh line of industry, and thus left destitute and dangerous; the small funded tradesmen and landowners, who had volunteered in their enthusiasm to invest money in the concern; not to speak of the wiseacres who had committed themselves by their hot support, and gaged their reputation on the success of the undertaking.

It is not easy to realize at this day how the premature downfall of one narrow, factious scheme distracted Market Northorpe, when its manufactories and steam power were still in the future.

Sir Charles's might extended beyond the grave. He had, with characteristic self-concentration and egotism, died intestate; but through this power the heir-at-law was at liberty to cancel his business project, to command the print shop, as far as he was concerned, to be closed, and the paper mill left, raised but a few feet above its foundation, a prey to uselessness and decay.

There was not sufficient unity or force in the townsmen to defy the chief's mandate, however prejudicial; there was only wrath, loud as well as deep, against its author, and finally against the scapegoat, Mr. Guy.

No one seemed to regret that as surely as Squire Bolton was redeemed, Guy Hathaway must be condemned. It was the fact that, smarting under the evils inflicted on him, he had wilfully severed the bond that bound him to Hathaway Hall, and renounced farther obedience and obligation to its owner.

The Park Cottage and its gardens were now the sole possession or expectation of Mr. Guy, and unless Patty Ford maintained him by her lace-weaving, or he enlisted as a soldier, he might die of starvation.

How the base scum of Market Northorpe turned with this on the unhappy young man! If they had chastised Squire Bolton with whips, they would scourge Guy Hathaway with scorpions, for was he not the creature of their own baulked imaginations —and had he not fallen twice as low? How they raked up his follies and errors, his levity, his spendthrift ways, his insolence (a spontaneous and manifest lie), his serpent-like requital of their confidence.

How they forgot his pleasantness, and overwhelmed him with coarse abuse. Such is, at times, the voice of the people, which, like that of Herod, has been mistaken for God's. Yet God ever bless the people, and guide them to a right mind!

Mr. Guy could not stand the persecution long, neither was there any gain to be attained by it, and his quick, restless step, his bitter lips, and despairing eyes, would soon be carried elsewhere. Poor comely, kindly Mr. Guy!

Every morning Sylvia Bolton rose to the knowledge of better fortunes; a hundred times a day she was conscious that the hurt of the family was healed. The Squire resumed his functions with his old wholesome alacrity; Mrs. Bolton nursed her ailments and crotchets, and contended with Black George at her ease; Joan was as cheery as a cricket; and Ned as bland as balm. Sylvia was thankful that they were saved, but she was sensible of a heaviness at her heart at variance with their early hours, her numerous avocations, and her high health, and with the very season, the summer days, for which one longs in the winter of the year, and of life. When the hay harvest was yet in swathes in the meadows; when the elder-flower was steeping in the bin, and the wren's nest in the clematis over the porch was crowded with callow nurslings; and when Dobbin and his fellows were decked with ribbons, and sent off to prance at the Wareham Races; when expert fishers from Market Northorpe were lashing the trout stream and trolling their catches, and the farming men shouting at night over their ninepins,—all nature was summoned to be glad; the very air was full of mealy

butterflies and moths, glistening beetles, and whirling midges floating or dancing out their brief existence. Sylvia was sorry that they died so soon; she missed 'the blossom that hangs from the bough;' she melted over the hapless ducklings drowned in a bend of the stream; and sobbed outright when the old work-horse died, like a warrior in harness. Oh, poor Mr. Guy. It was silly, undignified, and she dared to say she would soon get over it, but she could no longer conceal from herself that she was very low about Mr. Guy. She sometimes started up quite wildly in the silence and solitude of night, wishing that she had never seen him, or that she could but have been frank, gentle, loving to his old, ill-considered advances.

Sylvia was walking slowly and sadly down one of her lanes, unobservant of the rustling corn, the fleeting clouds, the leafiness, the wayside flowers—the silver weed, and bladder campion, the scarlet Bennett, and herb Robert, and fringed chamomile, hardy, humble, and fair as cottage children. All at once she heard a footstep on the other side of the hedge, and before she had time to look up and pause, a man sprang through the hawthorn boughs, and Guy Hathaway stood before her.

Sylvia trembled like an aspen, and during the interview said no more than 'Don't—don't! Oh, pray, sir, be silent; leave me, Mr. Guy, leave me!' while Guy behaved like one frantic and false to his manliness and her weakness. It served no purpose to cry that he could not go without bidding her farewell—he would tell her he loved her—he loved her better than life—he would never forget her. Truly flesh is not stone, that those accents and

looks, that posture—Mr. Guy on his knees in her path—his groans, should not pierce to the core of the girl's heart, slowly drain her blood, and pale her cheek, and dim her eye; rise up in church, and at feasts, and on her sleepless bed; taunt and horrify her in the arms of another—sighing forth her pious marriage vows—nay, playing with her little children. He might forget, but he had taken care that Sylvia should remember.

Arrived at home, bewildered and spent, Sylvia was told that Patty Ford wished a word with her in the front kitchen. Sylvia went with reluctant feet into the low-roofed, flitch-hung kitchen, with a huge elm-tree root for a dresser, where Sylvia had held many a bout of brewing and baking, and where of a holiday winter's night the whole family would sometimes sit, roasting chesnuts and apples, telling tales and singing songs.

On the settle within the chimney sat Patty Ford, somewhat ruffled and jealous; for Black George stood grinning, burnishing pewter, and chattering to a starling in the neighbouring window. It was well known in the locality, that between Black George of the Gate-house and Patty Ford there was strong antagonism. With her slender wit, Patty had never overcome her slavish dread of his dusky skin and glittering eyes; and he in return revenged the slight to his looks by bestowing on her the benefit of his waggery.

The moment Patty observed Sylvia Bolton she got up and came eagerly forward, and retaining but one idea, forgot Black George and his mock

courtesy and absurd evolutions, to exclaim—'Miss Sylvie, what have you done to Mr. Guy?'

'Hush, hush, Patty,' implored Sylvia, starting and flushing like the guiltiest offender,—'you don't know what you're saying.'

'Yes, indeed, Miss,' persisted Patty: 'and you mun answer, and give me back my Mr. Guy, if you'll not have a gift of him—the handsomest and best husband in the county. Well, well, he has no need to go a-begging; he may have his pick of wives any day—only I thought you'd make a fine couple, and the whole town was of my opinion; why, the Squire 'ud come round in no time! Any way, give me back my Mr. Guy; not that black, glum man up at the Park Cottage; I'm afeard of him, Miss Sylvie; afeard of my Mr. Guy, whom I bore in my arms when he was a baby. He swore at me yesterday, and then he begged my pardon, and cried like you, or me, Miss Sylvie. They tell me he has lost his means, and is a ne'er-do-well; but it is not true, and the Hall would not suffer it. Isn't he come of the Hathaways of the Hall, and isn't that enough? Besides, he's the best lad that ever was born. I'd lay my life it is only a cross in love that ails him. What else masters a lad? I mind how my lad looked when I was coming out of the fever.'

'You are mistaken, Patty,' gasped Sylvia. 'I am very sorry. I cannot help it.'

'Don't say so, Miss Sylvie,' declared Patty, knitting her brows. 'You were always a good girl, but if you are bad, and bad to Mr. Guy, I mun just punish you, so that you'll not be like to forget it.'

Black George had been vigilantly watching the dialogue, and overhearing more than was desirable. In his self-consequence he did not hesitate to cut it short, partly incensed at the insult to Miss Sylvie, partly tickled at the option he was about to propose to Patty Ford.

'Now, I'll tell you what, Mrs. Patty, if you come here with your owdaciousness, a-scolding Miss Sylvie, and all for that *cuxcomb* who has got his deserts, I, who am Miss Sylvie's father's servant, will take in hand to punish you by a ducking in the goose-dub, or what you'll no doubt prefer—a kiss behind the scullery-door, Mrs. Patty.' As he advanced with outstretched arms, Patty shrieked as if the foul fiend proposed to embrace her, and without waiting for further parley, turned and fled out of the kitchen, through the garden, and along the high road to Market Northorpe, as fast as her feet could carry her.

Black George cackled vociferously at the success of his manœuvre—till little Sylvia, in her giddiness and distress, turned upon him loftily.

'Fie for shame, Black George; you keep your valour for a poor crazed woman.'

Black George was sensitive to the sarcasm—he had been mightily roasted by the other servants for his conduct on the night of the effigies' burning.

'Don't you reproach me, Miss Sylvie,' the fellow said with rueful pathos. 'I was afeard for you as well as for myself, yon night. I would have stood by you as long as by myself, and what could you ask more, Miss Sylvie?' Certainly Sylvia could ask no more, whatever she might hope for, or obtain.

CHAPTER IX.

SQUIRE BOLTON was abroad occupied in the town all next day; in the evening he brought out Ned and Joan, but still he was not at ease, and retired more than once from the family party to mount to the top of the house, where a garret window commanded a full view of Market Northorpe. At last he seemed to compose himself to his pipe, and jested with Sylvia on deserting the circle upon a pretence of tossing pancakes for supper.

Unexpectedly there came a loud knocking at the door, and the Squire himself darted out before any one else could obey the summons—before Ned, who conjectured that it was one of his souls in want of the consolations of religion, had half risen from his chair.

It was Patty Ford, breathless and wild-looking.

'Squire, Squire! for the love of God bid Miss Sylvie send a kind word to Mr. Guy—'cause it will be the last. He has gone out with his pistols in his breast and his sword in his hand—and the sky is kindling into a flame—and I'm thinking we'll be waking to the Day of Judgment.'

'Is it so, Patty, wench? You were right to come to me; I'm ready.' And Squire Bolton pulled her into the house, and consigned her to the guardianship of the female servants.

'Ned,' called Mr. Bolton, with a gallant rearing of his silvered head, and a soldier's mien. 'These Market Northorpe curs are snarling and biting to night;

come down and bid them be quiet in God's name—while I read the riot act in the King's, and cut down the first man that lays his finger on his neighbour's property. Once unloosed, there is no knowing where they'll burst—and there is harm enough done without their finishing the business like bloodhounds.'

Ned went with his father as fluttered as a girl, but with a girl's devotedness; and as Madam Bolton immediately announced herself taken with 'them spasms,' and demanded to be put to bed without lifting a finger—that is, by the combined exertions of the women, and to be farther sat up with, fanned, rubbed, sprinkled, coddled, guarded (she herself lynx-eyed to the least neglect), for the rest of the night, there was no room for additional demonstrations.

Sylvia and Joan slaved at their post until midnight, when, under the sedative nature of the cordials administered to her, Mrs. Bolton at last showed symptoms of drowsiness, and submitted to doze with only gaping Nan behind the curtain. Then Joan burst out with an energetic whisper,—'Quick, Sylvie, quick; on with your hood and mantle, and we will slip out and get a sight of the uproar. I gave the old lady a good dose, so that she'll never miss us. Ods-bobs, Sylvie, she'll be none the worse. I have been ready to tear my hair out twenty times; I've pinched my arms black and blue; she would try the patience of Job, twice over. No wonder my goodman is as still as a mouse. Run, Sylvie, run; for I've been leaning out of the garret window, and you could gather needles and pins in the High-street by this time. They've set fire to the Hathaway printing-office; and they're tearing down the mill piecemeal.

I'll be bound there's not a lass below but Patty Ford, snoring under lock and key to prevent sleep-walking. Run, Sylvie, run.'

Sylvia was too glad to comply with the bold suggestion, for all night her blood had been boiling, and her brain swimming, in intolerable suspense and apprehension.

The two women stole out of the front door; but before they had passed down the walk between the clipped hedges, ruddily illuminated, their course was impeded. Black George, his body shivering, his eyes glaring, was on their skirts, and grovelling at their feet.

'Oh, Miss Sylvie, come back! The Squire will rage like a bull if you get into danger; and young Mistress Ned can't fight for you, though she's more daring than lots of men. I'm left in charge here, and the lasses are off in a body, in spite of me—all save Nan, that you had upstairs; but you will listen to sense. I am left in charge here, and the robbers may change like the wind any moment, and march upon the Gate-house, to burn and slay, as they did before. And I'll not have your face to put heart in me, and hinder me deserting my post. Oh, dear Miss Sylvie, stay with me, or I'll go distracted!'

'You black beetle! you deserve to be trampled upon,' raged the parson's wife, in great disgust. 'Never was such a coward, my dear; but there is no help for it. We must go back, else he'll follow and betray us. Besides, the Gate-house is not safe without us.' So Joan and Sylvia retreated to garrison the mansion.

The Squire had peremptorily bidden them to retire to bed; but they did not obey his orders until the

strange, reflected glow died out from the leaves of the evergreens—and transgression and shame with them; until the clear, pearly dawn was spreading in the east; and the Squire, with two companions, was visible, hieing homeward. Then the women put out their lights and sought their chambers: Joan, sure to learn the particulars from Ned; Sylvia, because she had a great repugnance to face her father.

Sylvia contented herself with peeping through her shutters. God bless the gallant old Squire! the hunted hare, or the stag at bay would not have wanted a lair with him, though they had been the same animals that had broken into his fields, devoured his substance, and cost him a world of trouble and care. The tears rained in showers from Sylvia's clear eyes, and broken blessings fell fast from her lips.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT morning, when Sylvia stole shyly down into the Walnut Parlour, and found her father in a brown study on the hearth-rug—notwithstanding the grate was filled with green fir branches—she ventured to creep up to him and whisper—

'What a terrible night it was, papa!'

The Squire tolerated the address, and made use of her immediately.

'Sylly, girl, in the absence of Ned, can you tell me what's in Scripture regarding a man and his enemies? Samson burnt them out with fox tails; but there's a thing or two on the other score, I guess.'

'"If thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink." "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."'

'Answered like a clerk, Sylly. So, it is an express condition, as well as an injunction. It must be very seldom in men's power, or else they decline to lay their foundations, I'm thinking.'

Joan and Ned came in, and then there was a fair discussion of the night's work. How much damage the mob had done before the Squire could reach them; how he had urged upon the mayor and shareholders to have special constables secretly sworn in beforehand; and to apprize the military at Wareham, that they might be prepared in case the sane portion of the community should not suffice to bind the insane—that is, the discharged desperate workmen: but it was best to hear the Squire's conclusion, his unprompted, impartial, full testimony to his coadjutor.

'Ned did his duty, Madam,' he said, turning with a certain ceremony, and bowing to Ned's wife. 'The spirit is willing, though the flesh is weak; he stood, unarmed, and confronted the smoke and fire, and rattle and crash of sticks and stones; and there were ugly wounds given and taken; besides two bodies—men yesterday, on the church pavement. I can compare him to nobody but Sylly, for Ned was always a bit of a girl; but he had the pluck to denounce the heathenish act in the name of his Master, until the honestest drew back and muttered, "Good lack! if the soft, young parson tells us so, we must be in bad taking; it is for our sakes he does it, we know that, men, right well." Madam, I believe in

God Almighty's commission to the priest, and his shield over him, by the example of my son.'

'Ned Bolton, I'm proud of you,' said Joan, fervently; and Ned felt that he was reaping a harvest of laurels.

Still, the Squire did not offer the slightest allusion to the guest under his roof, nor did a stranger appear at the hospitable breakfast-table to share in the baron of beef and the black puddings. But when Sylvia was preparing to serve her mother in her own room, the Squire laid hold of a load of provisions, and carried them off with his own hands to stop some hidden mouth.

'Hum,' soliloquized the Squire, as he made his exit from the stranger's room a short time afterwards; 'if he don't rouse himself, what with these bruises and burns, and his mental condition, his life isn't worth a button. They'll say I've brought him up, and put him out of my way at my leisure; they're malicious enough if *he* were to the fore to egg them on. This ain't forgiving my enemies, I suppose; but too much can't be expected of a man at once. There's one of my enemies, the least venomous too, low enough to crave pity from "All good folks," such as Sylly sings about. Patty Ford will be lighter in the head than ever, if she gets near him. Ned is fit for a crisis; but when that is over, he will talk by rote, and the lad wont listen. I have it. I wager he'll speak to Sylly. Women have a gift at consolation. Here, Sylly, girl—Sylly, Sylly.'

Sylly's quick foot tapped, tapped upon the stone stair; and without a word of explanation beyond

'Here's a piece of charity for you, Sylly,' the Squire pushed the girl into the stranger's room—thus, barefacedly and upon delusive premises, devolving upon her his dilemma.

Guy Hathaway was sitting at the table with his head in his hands. He did not look up, and Sylvia Bolton remained a moment petrified, until her very womanliness reinvigorated her. His dress was covered with mud, rent, and scorched; one arm was bandaged, and stretched helplessly before him. Oh! the unconscious expression of weariness and pain in the attitude of that wounded arm!

Sylvia made a hesitating step forward, then came swiftly to his side—all awkwardness and tremor vanished.

'Are you much hurt, Mr. Guy?' she asked in her sweet, steady voice, and went on—'Let me see if I can do anything for you; I'm used to helping mamma. I will be very careful.'

He looked up at her with confused, blood-shot eyes, and attempted to take her hand with his own disengaged one.

Sylvia did not wince or draw back. Oh, no! She talked away from her heart as if he had been Sam or Ned. She could not have credited it an hour ago, but there she stood, her hand in his, telling him in her frank, impetuous way how barbarous the Market Northorpe people had been; how much she was ashamed of them; how brave and noble it was in him to defend the property entrusted to his care by those who had served him cruelly—while the poor young fellow was indescribably soothed by the touch of the trusting, clasping fingers,

and the sound of the loved, girlish voice, so that before he recovered altogether, he fancied his purgatory transformed into an elysium.

'It is not very bad,' he said, dreamily, referring to his injury and to the riot, with his white lips forming themselves into a smile; 'not so much worse than what went before. The world has been hard upon me for these last few weeks.'

'I know it,' Sylvia assented, earnestly. 'Not one of the boys could have borne it.'

'I wish I had been one of the boys, Sylvie—don't they call you Sylvie, and Sylly?—I beg your pardon, but I should like to say it just once. I never had a sister, and all the mother I've known is poor Patty Ford. Oh dear' (restlessly), 'how Patty will bother; you are so good, will you see to the poor body, Miss Sylvia Bolton?'

'Yes, I will. She is here at the Gate-house, only she has not been let up beside you, because she would fret and persuade you that you were a deal worse than you really are. I'm accustomed to illness, because I've seen so much of it in my poor mamma; so, sir, papa has sent me to look after you, an't please you.'

'Squire Bolton has laid me under a debt of gratitude, madam,' Guy responded, rousing himself, with a sigh. 'I wished that he had permitted me to get my death in the scuffle last night, rather than survive to seek my fortunes elsewhere—a broken man, with a heavy heart; but now I will do my best to get well again, and weather life as others have done. The only man I ever knowingly wronged is the best gentleman in the land; but I hope I am a gentleman

also; and if I cannot atone for the wrong, I will not take advantage of his—and your humanity. I humbly beg your pardon for everything in which I have offended you. I thank you from my soul; and, Miss Sylvia, I have recovered my senses, I will not detain you any longer.'

CHAPTER XI.

'DEAR me, Mr. Bolton, you are the oddest man —the most contrary. You cast yourself in the teeth of poor Sir Charles, until we were all but ruined; and now, when there is no advantage to be gained, when everybody says the young man is good for nothing and cast adrift—you take him into the bosom of your family, and keep him there, as if he had a claim on us, or as if you venerated the very name.'

'By no means, Sally, the worst I know of the lad is the said name.'

Mr. Bolton was prejudiced; for Hathaway smacked of rose-headed sainfoin, russet wheat, neighing colts, and whistling plough-boys—associations which he loved with his whole country heart.

But the Squire had his ends, which he digested with his dinner, strolling about his meadows.

'The worst I know of the lad is the name. He is as good as if he had received another breeding—far too good for a scapegoat. I never more than half hated that boy, and now, since he has not beaten me but I him, since I believe I saved his life, zounds!

I'm tempted to make a fool of him. Haven't you enough sons, Mark Bolton, that you must adopt another? Haven't you reason to distrust your exchequer? Yes, but you've a daughter. Well, what has that to do with it? The world will call you a jackass, the more so that your diet has been clean thistles of late—and only to buckle two young things together that fools may incline their heads and ejaculate "a pretty couple." A pretty couple, and a loving, as long as love lasts—and that may be a week, a month, a year, or for ever, as some moon-struck fools swear. I fancy they could not help themselves. They've behaved better than those that came before them, I'll be sworn. Let them have their dream of delight, their chance like the rest of mankind.'

So when Guy Hathaway would have started on his pilgrimage, he was detained by a generous restraint, a kindly power; bidden think whether Market Northorpe might not still be his destination, and the book trade his final calling. Guy was touched to the quick, and just because he was of so true and guileless a temper, he stooped to bear that burden of favour, only vowing that Market Northorpe should never know a more industrious citizen, or Squire Bolton a more faithful son.

Guy Hathaway not only remained an inmate of the Gate-house, but he went daily with Mr. Bolton to his printing-office—once more the sole intellectual engine of Market Northorpe; until the town solved the mystery that the Squire, with the consent of his sons, and in room of Sam, Ned, and Mark, disqualified or disinclined, had, by an odd but brilliant stroke of

policy, appointed his former rival as his future assistant and successor.

The gossips marvelled their nine days' wonder. The Squire was flagrantly irregular in his proceedings —Mr. Guy very mean-spirited; but the Squire was even more innocuous than formerly to public opinion, and incontinently public opinion was elevating him to his old eminence—the philosopher of Market Northorpe, sage, angular, headstrong, impregnable, without even Sir Charles to call him to order.

For Mr. Guy, they ought to have seen him, and would yet see him (they had at first blinked the point in their renewed misgivings and self-reproaches, and in the concessions they had already made), only a little altered by adversity, more earnest, less prone to company, and thoughtful as he was diligent—his character sifted and strengthened. But the gravity belonged to Market Northorpe and business; at the Gate-house the new sedateness was apt to yield to the old man—for one blast of misfortune will no more subdue the innate elasticity of a manly spirit, than it will brace and ennoble a weak and depraved one. So on winter nights, when they played at forfeits and blind-man's buff, or bandied guesses and sentiments; and during another spring, when Ned strolled out from Market Northorpe, and he and Guy had a game at bowls on the green—the Squire standing with his hands behind his back, the mighty umpire—and the weather warm enough for Sylvia, with or without Joan, to carry out her work to the arbour, and sit there with her little spaniel on the bench beside her, occasionally glancing up at the competitors, Mr. Guy was very much the

ardent Mr. Guy who had not yet been taken up as a tool, worked unscrupulously, wasted, and cast aside.

Patty Ford was willing to keep the Park Cottage for Mr. Guy till he was ready to return to it. She could trust him with Miss Sylvie and Black George, since he was recovered and restored to himself; and she had a cheerful theory of her own on his domestication at the Gate-house, which she imparted early to the Squire, and on which she and he had sundry confabulations, generally before breakfast, when the dew was on the grass, in the open air, and at a safe distance from the premises and the Gorgon's head of Black George. By the Squire's advice, Patty only extended her confidence to the rest of the world in the shape of becks, bows, and wreathed nods.

Market Northorpe had its version of Patty Ford's inspiration, and would fain have cross-examined Sylvia Bolton on the matter, but found Sylvia grown precise and close, and could make nothing of her; perhaps Guy too thought Sylvia after a brief interval precise and close, and determined to vindicate any maidenly prerogative she might have waived for a moment. But Guy was in no hurry to resign Sylvia; on the contrary, he looked up to her so simply and sincerely, that he might have literally served for her at a modest distance half his life, in spite of cordial external encouragement, had it not been for a fortuitous circumstance.

Sylvia Bolton had an invitation to visit London, see the great world, go to the play, dance at Vauxhall, lose all her unsophisticated ways, and be wooed

and won by some gallant, gay Lothario of that wonderful metropolis. The opportunity presented itself in the midst of the assembled family at the Gate-house breakfast-table, when the roses were blossoming, and the bees humming in the third summer of our acquaintance with the Gate-house and its garden.

Sylvia received the boon sensibly enough; she was a little dazzled, but like a good girl, she thought the next moment of her ailing mother; of Ned's baby cutting its teeth under a protest; and her father's habits; and her general importance at home —and was chary in her approbation; when, chancing to raise her eyes, to her surprise and indignation she detected an intelligent glance between Guy Hathaway and her father, and sprang at once to the opposite pole of the question. She cried how wild she was with joy; how kind of her second cousins to remember her; how she could not believe she was to be so lucky; how certain she was she could never exist at the Gate-house after she had lived three months in London—confirmed in her angry independence by Guy's ill-concealed chagrin—and the Squire's equanimity. All day Sylvia was disturbed and affronted—ready to cry the one moment and laugh the next. Why should Guy Hathaway and her father have a mutual understanding where she was concerned?—not that she heeded their secrets—but it was making light of her; it was unfair, unkind.

To compose her ruffled frame, Sylvia took refuge in her green bower after dinner, when, according to his calendar, Guy Hathaway should have been dis-

posed of in Market Northorpe for the rest of the day—but the idle gentleman intruded upon her before she had embroidered half an inch of her robe.

Sylvia was cold and hot, sewed fast, sat bolt upright, and pressed her red lips together, resolute to hide their pouting.

Guy was agitated and self-convicted, fumbled for an argument, looked and sighed, and at last brought out an egotistical regret that she should be so glad to travel all the way to London.

'And why not, sir?' demanded Sylvia, sharply.

Guy looked at the blue sky, the gorgeous peonies, those Queens of Sheba, the pure lilies, and the little brown feathery forests of London Pride, very disconsolately, very much as if she would leave nothing behind her, as if her conduct might be natural, but was cruel.

Sylvia did not acknowledge the mute remonstrance; and Guy was forced to speak plainly, and to commit his fate to the cast of a word.

'I would take you with all my heart, Sylvie: your father would spare me, and we would see Guildhall, and the palaces, and gardens, and the great world together. You should have all you liked that I could give you; I would do all that man could do for one who made him so happy. Your peace and honour have long been dearer to me than my own. I wish I could fight for you—die for you, Sylvie.'

'What right have you and papa to plot and plan, and decide for me, without my concurrence? To dispose of me as if I were stone, or wax?'

'Right!' echoed Guy Hathaway, quickly. 'I

have none, and you know it; every man may have a title here, save myself. I thought the question was not of right, but of gift. The Squire has been too magnanimous,' and Guy half turned on his heel.

Then there flashed on Sylvia, as they say a panorama of life speeds past a drowning man, Guy Hathaway, in his gallant, youthful splendour, entering Market Northorpe theatre, distinguished by all, and distinguishing her and her only; Guy's kind arms round her in the election mob; Guy and herself dancing formally together at the Parnells; Guy presenting the daisy and copy of verses, those verses, oh! proud, peevish heart, which she had stored up to this day; the anguish of Guy's farewell, sobbed out without the extortion of a single favour; the bitterness of Guy's abasement, sweetened by her lightest word; and now Guy's declaration, privileged as she had never dared to dream it—so ungratefully, so cruelly received.

'What right? I did not mean it. Oh, who could have a right like Guy?'

The small whisper won Guy back like a trumpet blast—thrilled rather more through his foolish, panting heart.

And Sylvia, all her little airs and tempests flung from her, could do no other than repeat the one word, 'Guy, Guy'—comprehensible enough to bless Guy beyond crowns and kingdoms, and to cast him at her feet kneeling as lovers knelt, kissing the pink and white hand, pulling it down with bolder tenderness, until, like a conqueror, he had pressed the ripe, rosy lips which had pronounced his election,

with neither title nor repulse beyond the faint, sweet 'Guy, Guy,' that sounded something between the holy chimes of Christmas eve, and the merry peal of wedding bells—answering it in his lavish vocabulary whose fond expressions have grown quaint to us, like the buds and garlands pressed flat and dry between the yellowing pages of a closed book, but fragrant through all time, his 'dearest dear,' his 'best life,' his 'sweet heart.'

'Ain't I forgiving my enemies now, Sylly?' whispered Squire Bolton, ruefully, as he kissed his daughter, at the end of that famous dance, in which to crown all wonders and complete all harmonies, Black George led off giggling, shaking Patty Ford.

'La, if poor Sir Charles had but lived to see this day,' mourned Mrs. Bolton; but even Guy was remorsefully conscious that at that moment he could not be human, and acquiesce in his mother-in-law's apostrophe.

'Lord, Madam,' exclaimed Mrs. Ned, 'leave him where he is; you know—

> Happy's the corpse that the rain rains on,
> Happy's the bride that the sun shines on.'

The Squire never regretted his clemency, though every market day when he rode past Park Cottage, he saw his jewel transferred from his hand to sparkle with new lustre on Guy Hathaway's.

Guy proved himself worthy — all Market Northorpe swore it, and so stoutly that they disdained to admit they had ever impugned the fact. If any second couple in England had ventured to claim the Dunmow Flitch it must have been Guy and Sylvia

Hathaway, whose names are to be seen carved side by side, as they lived, in a record, including three out of their nine children, on a stone let into the chancel of Market Northorpe church. Another evident vestige of the junior branch of the Hathaways is a bridge, purporting to have been erected at the sole expense of Mr. Guy Hathaway, paper-maker, printer, and publisher—first for the traffic of his mill, and next for the general convenience of Market Northorpe, and where, as Mayor of Market Northorpe, the said Mr. Guy Hathaway headed a deputation of his townspeople, who met and addressed King George, when old instead of young was the adjunct to the royal name, in one of the good, yeoman Sovereign's last, peaceful peregrinations.

HECTOR GARRET OF OTTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRE.

A CALM, pure summer moonlight fell upon the Ayrshire mosses and deans, but did not silver, as far as we are concerned, the Carrick Castle of Bruce, nor Cameron's lair amidst the heather, nor landward Tintock, nor even sea-girt Ailsa Craig, but only the rolling waves of the Atlantic and a grey turreted mansion-house built on a promontory running abruptly into the water. The dim ivory light illuminated a gay company met in the dwelling with little thought of stillness or solemnity, but with their own sense of effect, grouped carelessly, but gracefully in an old-fashioned, but not unsuitable drawing-room.

They needed relief, these brilliant supple figures; they demanded the background of grey hangings, scant carpet, spindle-legged chairs, hard sombre prints. To these very cultivated, very artificial and picturesque personages, a family sitting-room was

but a stage, its scenery of minor importance, where lively, capricious, yet calculating actors were engaged in playing their several parts.

The party were mostly French, from the mass of gallant, dauntless emigrants, many of whom were thus entertained with grateful, commiserating hospitality in households whose members had but lately basked in the sparkling geniality of the southern atmosphere, now lurid and surcharged with thunder.

There was a Marquise, worldly, light and vain, whom adversity had not broken, and could not sour. An Abbé, bland and double, but gentle and kindly in his way; a soldier, volatile, hot-headed, brave as a lion, simple as a child; an older man, sad, sneering, indifferent to this world and the next, but with the wrecks of a noble head, and, God help him, a noble heart.

Of the three individuals present of a different nation and creed, two closely resembled the others with only that vague, impalpable, but perceptible distinction of those whose rearing affords a superficial growth which overspreads but does not annihilate the original plant. The one was a young man, buoyant, flippant, and reckless as the French soldier, but with a bold defiance in his tone all his own; the other a young girl, coquettish and vivacious as the Marquise, but with a deep consciousness under her feigning, an undercurrent of watchful pride and passion, of which her model was destitute. The last of the circle was a fair-haired, broad-shouldered lad, who stood apart from the others, big, shy, silent—but how earnest amid their shallowness, how noble amid their hollowness, how devoted amid their

fickleness. How he gazed on the arch, haughty girl, with her lilies and roses, her pencilled brows, her magnificent hair magnificently arranged, her rich silk and airy lace, and muslin folded and gathered and falling into lines which were the poetry of attire, unless where a piquant provoking frill, band, or peak, reminded the gazer that the princess was a woman, a mocking mischievous woman, as well as a radiant lady. How he listened to her contradictory words, witty and liquid in their most worthless accents! how he drank in her songs, the notes of her harp, the rustle of her dress, the fall of her foot! how he started if she moved! how he saw her, though his eyes were on the ground, though his head was in his hands, and she marked him ceaselessly, half with cruel triumph, half with a flutter and faintness which she resisted and denied—angrily, scornfully.

A few more gay *bons mots* and repartees, a last epigram from the Abbé, a court anecdote from the Marquise which might have figured in one of those letters of Madame de Sévigné where the freshness of the haymaker of Les Rochers survives the glare and the terrible staleness of the Versailles of Louis XV., a blunt camp jest from the soldier, a sarcasm from the philosopher, a joyous barcarole, strangely succeeded by a snatch from that lament of woe wrung forth by the fatal field of Flodden, and the company dispersed, the horse's hoofs of the single stranger of the evening ringing on the causeway, as he made for the smooth sands of the bay, the lights one by one leaping out, and the pale moon remaining mistress of Earlscraig as when the warder on yon tower

peered out over the waters for the boats of the savage Irish kern, or lit the bale-fire that summoned Montgomery and Muir to ride and run for the love or the fear of Boswell of Earlscraig.

Had these old-world times returned by magic? had a crazed serving-man revived the vanished duties of his warlike predecessor? was the wraith of seneschal or man-at-arms conjuring up a ghostly beacon to stream into the soft air? was an evil spirit about to bewilder and mislead a fated ship to meet its doom on the jagged rocks beneath the dead calm of that glassy sea? So dense the vapour that suddenly gathered over Earlscraig, till like an electric flash, a jet of flame sprang from a high casement and lit up the gathering obscurity. No horn blew, no bugle sounded, no tramp of horse or hurrying feet broke the silence; the house lay in profound rest, the sleepers slept on, though truly that was no phantom glare, no marsh gleam, but the near presence of an awful foe.

And the smoke burst forth in thicker, more suffocating volumes; the red streamers shot up again and again, the burning embers fell like thickest swarms of fire-flies, before a single hasty step roused an echo already lost in the roar and crackle of fire. A scared, half-dressed servant ran out into the court, flung up his hands as he looked around him, hurried back, and suddenly the great bell pealed out its faithful alarum. 'Good folk, good folk, danger is at the door! For Jesu's sake and your dear lives, up and flee! The angels hold out their hands, Sodom is around you—away, away!'

The summons was not in vain. Within a few

seconds clamorous outcries, shrieks of dismay, the dashing open of doors and windows, answered the proclamation. A horror-struck crowd assembled rapidly in the court; but notwithstanding that the Abbé's wan face and shaven crown appeared speedily, and the soldier shouted, 'Who is in danger? *mes camarades, suivez-moi!*' the philosopher instinctively elected himself commander; he rose, tall and erect, over the heads of his fellows; his face flushed and brightened; he spoke words of wisdom and resolution whose spirit men recognised through the veil of his frozen tongue—cravens shrank back, brave men rallied round him!

'Where is Boswell? *Mon Dieu!* the house is burning and the master is not found! Adolphe, *sauve la Marquise, cet escalier n'est pas perdu.* But where is Boswell? Show his room to me—the nearest way—quick, or he perishes. *Ah, le voila!*'

Down a flight of side steps stumbled the butler and a favourite groom, bearing between them the young laird, motionless, senseless, his dress dishevelled, but unscathed by flame, unstained by blood; his marked, imperious features breathing, yet unconscious, heavy, and lethargic.

The Abbé and his elder friend exchanged glances. The brow of the latter contracted in disgust and gloom.

'Adolphe and he played billiards against my desire, as if he were not bête enough already,' he said in an under-tone. 'Lay him here, my friends,' to the servants, 'and listen to me. If you love the Seigneur, let him never know that thus it happened this night. Cover him with a mantle; he will

awake to see his chateau a ruin. *Mais, n'importe,* we will do our best. Carry out what is most precious; bring up buckets of water. *Ma foi,* there is enough at hand.'

Yes; at their feet, by a few fathoms unavailable, lay the broad sea, sufficient to extinguish the conflagration of a thousand cities, while the house above was rent with fierce heat, to which the sea only reddened like blood, in sympathy with the midnight sky.

The Marquise was rescued sobbing and shivering, but sharing her blanket with one of the poor servant girls; even the old bed-ridden nurse, so blind and stupid with age that none could satisfy her of the cause of the tumult and din, was carried abroad, and placed on the grass terrace beside the master; where no sooner did she apprehend intuitively the neighbourhood of her proudly cherished nursling, than she left off her weak wailing, and began to croon over him as fondly and contentedly as when he lay an innocent babe in his cradle.

'Are you weary, Earlscraig? Have you come back sorely tired from the hunt or the race? Weary fall the men folk that let you lie down with the dew-drops on your bonny curls — bonnier than Miss Alice's, for all their fleechin'—as if it were high noon. Not but noontide has its ills, too; but you would never heed a bonnet, neither for sun nor wind. A wild laddie, a wild laddie, Earlscraig!'

Eager but ignorant hands were piling up heaps of miscellaneous goods — pictures, feather-beds, old armour, plate, mirrors, harness, carpets, wearing apparel—the first seized, and all tossed together in

wild confusion. The moon was hidden; air, earth, and water were lurid; a hot blast blew in men's faces, which alone remained white and haggard, when a murmur and question, a doubt and frenzy, first stirred and fast convulsed the mass. 'Where was Miss Alice?' Ay, where was Miss Alice? Who had seen her? Speak, in God's name!—shout her name until her voice replies, and men's shuddering souls are freed from this ghastly nightmare.

Miss Alice! Alice Boswell! you are safe, lamenting unseen the home of your fathers; you are not within that turret whose foundation rock descends sheer into the sea—that turret close by which the demon began his work, where his forked tongue is now licking each loophole and outlet, where beams are bursting and the yawning jaws of hell are about to swallow up the rapid wreck—forgotten, forsaken—the queen of hearts, the wooed and worshipped beauty; fair and sweet, ripe and rare, the sole daughter of the race; the charm and delight of its grey heads?

Oh, Father, thou art terrible in thy decrees! Oh, men, ye are miserable fools! She is there by the blazing framework of the window of her chamber, which she has never quitted; her hair loose, some portion of her dress cast about her, her eyes wide open and glazing with terror, but strangely beautiful —with a glory behind and about her; an unearthly brightness upon brow and cheek, and white arms stretched out imploringly, despairingly for help—help in her utmost need.

They pressed forward; they looked up in anguish; old men who had followed her a fairy child, friends

of long standing, acquaintances of yesterday. Again and again the gallant soldier penetrated the low doorway; again and again he swerved and recoiled from the furnace fumes that met him—a more fearful encounter than the fury of the sans culottes and the reeking pools beneath the guillotine.

'*Courage, soldats! Vive la mort, pour la femme et pour la gloire;*' and with a shout half-exulting, half-maddened, the Gallic blood again fired to the desperate feat. Then a diversion arose—a rush to the opposite side of the building—a ladder of use there—a notion of forcing open a closed-up and disused gallery of communication, seized hold of these agitated minds, and offered a vent to the pent-up sympathy and distress. New energy supplanted stupor; and through the deep hush of the fire could be distinguished the blows of axe and hammer, wielded lustily by stalwart and devoted arms, eager to clear a way of life and liberty to the captive. .

But the attempt was a work of time, and louder crackled and hissed the flames. A fiercer blaze filled the sky, and glittered back from the waves; the serpent tongues drew together, and shot up through the room in a yellow pyramid. In vain! in vain! The zealous labourers panted in the sickness of horror and the chill of great awe.

'A boat! a boat!' called a voice from the outer circle. The thinker, the scorner, stood on the verge of the rocks above the illuminated sea, his head bare, his coat stripped off. 'Let Mademoiselle cast herself from the casement instantly; it is her only hope. I can swim; I will hold her up until a boat

is launched. *Courage, Mademoiselle;* trust in God and in me.'

'Yes, Marquise,' he whispered for a second to his countrywoman near him; 'I have lost God for many a day; I have found him again in this hour. A *Te Deum* for my requiem!' and looking aghast upon his face in the great light, the Marquise crossed herself, and averred ever afterwards that it was transformed like unto that of his patron saint, St. Francis. The next moment he plunged into the midnight sea; those who witnessed the action declared that the reflection of the burning was so strong he seemed to sink into a lake of fire, where he rose again presently, breasting the waters stoutly and successfully.

The girl saw the design; she comprehended it, and the hoarse murmur of encouragement that hailed its presence of mind. The concentration of the flames, which threatened every moment to bring down a portion of the ponderous roof in one destroying crash, left a freer passage. She advanced quickly —she put her foot on the smouldering sill; she paused, hesitated. It was a fearful alternative.

'Leap down, leap down, Miss Alice; a drowning man has two lives, a burning man but one. Down, down, or you are lost!'

But another cry mingled with the vehement appeal—a piercing, confident cry, that would have vibrated on the dulled ear of the dying, although it said only, 'I am coming, Alice Boswell; I am coming!'

He was there, on his panting, foam-flecked horse; he flung himself from the saddle; he heard her answer, 'Hector Garret, save me, save me!'

He broke the circle as Samson burst the green withes; he paralysed all remonstrance; he vanished into the abyss which the great staircase presented. He must have borne a charmed life to reach thus far—when a mightier roar, a perfect column of fire, a thundering avalanche of glowing timber and huge stones descended with the shock of an earthquake, and rebounded into the sea, ingulphing for ever the fair slight form within.

By daring and magnanimous effort and main force, other arms bore back Hector Garret from the tottering walls and shaken foundation; and the boat rowed out and delivered the heroic Frenchman. The sinking in of the turret roof satiated the destroyer, so that the farther wing of the house was preserved. Its master lived unharmed, to rouse himself from his portentous slumber and face his calamity, while the lover lay writhing and raging in the clutch of wild fever, more merciful far than high health.

But the summer sun shining down on the sea, once more blue and clear as heaven, fell on black yawning gaps and mounds of ashes; on shivered glass and strewn relics of former luxury; on the very grass of the promontory, brown and withered, and trodden into the earth for many a yard; on the horrible grave of the maiden who had watched her own image in the crystal pools, lilted her syren songs to the break of the waves, woven at once chains for her adorers and the web of that destiny which buried her there, unshrouded and uncoffined —'while seed-time and harvest, day and night, should endure.'

CHAPTER II.

THE OFFER.

THE rush of trade, not quite so deep and rapid thirty years since as now, but still strong and swift, the growth of centuries, though the Clyde was yet forded by man and horse where ships now ride at anchor, was hurrying, jostling, trampling onward in Jamaica street and Buchanan-street and their busy thoroughfares; but within our quarter were the stillness and dimness, the cold, lofty, classic repose of the noble college to which a professor's house was in immediate vicinity.

The room, large, low-roofed, with small, peaked windows, had not been built in modern times. The furniture was almost in keeping: roomy settees, broad, plain, ribbed-backed chairs, with faded worked covers, the task of fingers crumbled into dust, heavy bookcases loaded with proportionably ponderous or curiously quaint volumes, and mirrors, with their frames like coffins covered with black velvet and relieved by gilding.

The only fresh and fragrant thing in the room—ay, or in the house, where master and mistress and servants were old and withered, with chilled blood and subdued steps—was a young girl seated on a window-seat, her hands lightly crossed, watching the white clouds in the July sky, white, though nothing else in Glasgow is so, and the air is heavy with perpetual smoke and vapour.

That girl, too broad browed and large eyed for

mere youthful beauty, but with such an arch, delicate, girlish mouth and chin as betokened her a frank, unsophisticated, merry child, after all, was Leslie Bower, the young daughter and only child of an erudite and venerated professor.

As Leslie had no brothers and no sisters, in a sense she had neither father nor mother, for Professor Bower was the son, husband, and father of his books, and he had so mighty a family of these, ancient and modern, that he had very little time or attention to spare for ties of the flesh. He was a mild, absent, engrossed old man, flashing into energy and genius in his own field of learning, but in the world of ordinary humanity a body without a soul.

Professor Bower married late in life, well or ill, a timid, shrinking, English wife, who, removed from all early ties, and never mingling in Glasgow society, lapsed into a stillness as profound as his own.

Dr. Bower took little notice of his child; he had, what with duties and studies, no leisure: he read in his slippered morning gown, he read at meals, he read by his evening lamp; probably, if Mrs. Bower would confess it, he kept a volume under his pillow. No wonder he was a blear-eyed, poking, muttering old man, much more interested in Hannibal than in Buonaparte, regarding Leslie like the house, the yearly income, the rector, the students, the janitors, as one of many abstract facts with which he troubled himself as little as possible.

Mrs. Bower cared for Leslie's health and comfort with scrupulous, nervous exactness, but she was incapable of any other demonstration of regard; she

was as shy and egotistical as poor Louis XVI., and perhaps it would have demanded as tragic a domestic revolution to have stirred her up to lively tenderness. Leslie might have been as dubious as Marie Antoinette of the amount of love entertained for her by her nearest kin, but curiously, though affectionate and passionate enough to have been the pure and innocent child of some fiery Jacobin, she had not vexed herself about this mystery. One sees every day lush purple and rose-flowered plants growing in unaccountable shade; true, their associates are pale and drooping, and the growth of the hardier is treacherous, and may distil poison, but the evil principle is gradual, and after conditions have been confirmed and matured.

The stronger portion of Leslie's nature, which required abundant and invigorating food, was slow of development; the lighter side flourished in the silent, dull house, where nothing else courted the sunbeam. In her childhood and girlhood, Leslie had gone out to school, and although always somewhat marked and individual in character, she had companions, friends, sufficient sympathy and intercourse for an independent, buoyant nature at the most plastic period of its existence. This stage of life was but lately left behind; Leslie had not long learnt that now she was removed from classes and masters, and must in a great measure confine her acquaintances to those who returned her visits at her father's house; and as visitors put mamma and papa about, and did not suit their habits, she must resign her little world, and be almost as quiet and solitary as her elders. Leslie had just begun to sigh

a little for the old thronged, bustling class-rooms which she had lightly esteemed, and was active by fits and starts in numerous self-adopted occupations which could put former ones out of her head, and fill up the great blanks in her time and thoughts, for she was not inclined to sit down under a difficulty, but instinctively battled with it first in a thousand ways.

Thus Leslie had her flower-painting—few natural flowers she saw, poor girl—card boxes, worsted vases, egg-shell baskets, embroidery pieces, canary bird, and books—the last greedily devoured. She did not assist her mother, because although their household was limited, Mrs. Bower's quiet, methodical plans were perfect, and she gently declined all interference with her daily round. Neither did Leslie work for her father, because the professor would as soon have employed her canary bird. She was not thoughtful and painstaking for the poor, because, though accustomed to a species of almsgiving, she heard nothing, saw nothing of nearer or higher association with her neighbours. Yet there was capacity enough in that heart and brain for good or for evil.

So Leslie sat there, pausing in her sewing, and gazing idly at the sky, with a girl's quick pensiveness and thick-coming fancies.

'How blue it was yonder! What glorious clouds! yet the world below was rather stupid and tiresome, and it was hard to say what people toiled so arduously for. There were other lands and other people: should she ever see them? Surely, for she was quite young. She wished they could go in summer "down the water," out of this din and dust, to

some coast village or lonely loch between lofty purple mountains, such as she had seen when with Mrs. Elliot; papa might spare a few weeks, as poor people did; they had no holidays, and it was so hot and close, and always the same. But she supposed she must be contented, and go away to cool and compose herself in the crypt of their own cathedral. How grand it was; how solemn the aisles and arches on every side, like forest trees: and then the monuments! What stories she invented for them, and St. Mungo's Well. St. Mungo, austere, yet beneficent; with bare feet, cowled head, scarred back, and hardest of all, swept and garnished heart, with his fruitful blessing, "Let Glasgow flourish." What would St. Mungo think now of the city of the tree, the fish, and the bell?'

This hoar, venerable, beautiful feat of art was to the imprisoned Glasgow girl as St. Paul's to such another isolated imaginative nature.

There was a knock at the street-door; a very decided application of the queer, twisted knocker. Leslie roused herself: not a beggar's tap that; none of the janitors; and this was not Dr. Murdoch's or Dr. Ware's hour: the girl was accurate in taps and footsteps. Some one was shown in; a man's voice was heard greeting 'Dr. Bower,' before the study door was closed. Leslie started up with pleased surprise,—'Hector Garret of Otter! he will come upstairs to see us; he will tell us how the country is looking; he will bring news from Ferndean,' and for the next hour she sat in happy, patient expectation.

Mrs. Bower, a fair, faded, grave woman, came into the room, and sat down with her needlework in the other window.

'Mamma,' exclaimed Leslie, 'do you know that Hector Garret of Otter is downstairs with papa?'

'Yes, Leslie.'

'He never fails to ask for us; don't you think we'll see him here by and by?'

'I do not know; it depends upon his engagements.'

'I wonder what brings him to Glasgow just now; he must find it so much more agreeable at home,' with a little sigh.

'Leslie, I don't think you have anything to do with that.'

'No, certainly; Hector Garret and I are two very different persons.'

'Leslie!'

'Well, mamma.'

'I wish you would not say Hector Garret; it does not sound proper in a girl like you.'

'I suppose it does not. He must have been a grown-up man when I was a child. I have caught the habit from papa, but I have not the least inclination to use the name to his face.'

'I should think not, Leslie;' and the conversation dropped.

Presently the stranger entered deliberately; a tall, fair, handsome man of eight-and-thirty or forty, with one of those cold, intellectual, statuesque faces in which there is a chill harmony, and which are types of a calm temperament, or an extinct volcano.

Perhaps it was that cast of countenance which recommended him to the Bowers; yet Leslie was dark, bright, and variable.

The visitor brought a gift in his hand—a basket of flowers and summer fruit, of which Leslie eagerly relieved him, while she struggled in vain to look politely obliged, and not irrationally elated.

'So kind of you to trouble yourself! Such a beautiful flower—wild roses and hawthorn too—I like so much to have them, though they wither very soon. I dare say they grew where

> —— fairies light,
> On Cassilis Downans dance.'

(Burns was becoming famous, and Leslie had picked up the lines somewhere). 'And the strawberries, oh, they must be from Ferndean.'

The bearer nodded and smiled.

'I knew it by instinct,' and Leslie began eating them like a tempted child, staining her pretty lips. 'Those old rows on each side of the summer-house where papa first learnt his lessons—I wonder if there are jackdaws there still: wont you have some?

'No, thank you. What a memory you have, Miss Bower!'

'Ferndean is my Highland hill. When papa is very stiff and helpless from rheumatism, he talks of it sometimes. It is so long ago; he was so different then.'

Mr. Garret and Mrs. Bower exchanged a few civil words on his journey, the spring weather, the state of the war, soon exhausted, as two taciturn people who force their speeches; then he became Leslie's pro-

perty, sat down beside her, watched her arranging her flowers, helped her a little, and spoke now and then in answer to her questions, and that was sufficient.

Hector Garret was particularly struck this evening with the incongruity of Leslie's presence in the Professor's dry, silent, scholastic home, and with her monotonous, shaded existence, her want of natural associations, her separation from fitting companionship. He pondered upon her future; he was well acquainted with her prospects; he knew much better than she did that the money with which his father had bought up the mortgages on Ferndean, and finally the estate itself, was drained and scattered long ago, and that the miserable annuity upon which the Professor rested peacefully as a provision for his widow and child, died with the former. It was hard of credence that a man should be so regardless of his own family, but philosophy, Epicurean in its tendency, though it was but a student's self-indulgence—the echo of the mystic, sublime discourses of the Greek porches, the faint but sacred trace of the march of vast armies, and the fall of nations, caused Leslie to dwindle into a mere speck in the creation. Of course she would be provided for somehow: marry, or make her own livelihood. Socrates did not plague himself much about the fate of Xantippe: Seneca wrote from his exile to console his mother, but the epistles were for the benefit of the world at large, and destined to descend to future generations of barbarians.

What afrank, single-hearted young girl she seemed to Hector Garret—intelligent, capable of compre-

hending him in a degree, amusing him with her similes and suggestions; pretty, too, as one of those wild roses or pinks that she prized so highly, though she wore a sober, green, flowered silk dress—he should like to see her in a white gown. He supposed that was not a convenient town wear. Pope had unmasked women, but he could not help thinking that a fresh, simple, kind young girl would be rather a pleasant object of daily encounter. She would grow older, of course. That was a pity; but still she would be progressing into an unsophisticated, cordial, contented woman, whom servants would obey heartily —to whom children would cling. Even men had a gush of tenderness for these smiling, unobtrusive, humble mothers; and best so in the strain and burden of this life.

Leslie knew nothing of these meditations. She only understood Hector Garret as a considerate friend, distinguished personally, and gifted mentally —for her father set great store upon him—but, unlike the gruff or eager savants to whom she was accustomed, condescending to her youth and ignorance, with a courtesy the nearest high-breeding she had ever met. She was glad to see Hector Garret, even if he did not bring a breath of the country with him. She parted from him with a sense of loss—a passing sadness that hung upon her for an hour or two, like the vapour on the river, which misses the green boughs and waving woods, and sighs sluggishly past wharfs and warehouses.

It was a still greater surprise to Leslie when Hector Garret came again the next evening. He had never been with them on two successive days.

She had judged him back in Ayrshire, although he had not distinctly referred to his speedy return. But he was here, and Leslie entertained him as usual.

'Should not you like to see Ferndean?' inquired Hector Garret.

'Don't speak of it,' Leslie cautioned him, soberly; 'it would be far too great happiness for this world.'

'Why, what sort of dismal place do you think the world?'

'Too good a place for you and me,' Leslie answered evasively, and with a touch of fun.

'But this is the very season for Ferndean and Otter, when the pasture is gay as a garden, and you can have boating every day in the creeks, more sheltered than the moorland lochs.'

The tears came into Leslie's eyes.

'I think it is unkind of you, Mr. Garret, to tempt me with such pictures,' she answered, half pettishly.

'I mean to be kind,' he responded, quickly. 'I may err, but I can take refuge in my intentions. You may see Ferndean and Otter, if you can consent to go there, and dwell there as a grave man's friend and wife.'

Leslie started violently, and the blood rushed over her face.

'I beg your pardon, sir, but you don't mean it?'

'I do mean it, Leslie, as the best for both of us; and I ask you plainly and directly to marry me: if you agree, I hope and trust that you will never regret it.'

Leslie trembled very much. She said afterwards that she pinched her arm to satisfy herself that she was awake, but she was not quite overcome.

'I was never addressed so before. I do not know what to say. You are very good, but I am not fit.'

He interrupted her—not with vows and protestations, but resolutely and convincingly.

'I am the best judge of your fitness,—you must judge for yourself also. I am certain of your father's and mother's acquiescence, so I do not mention them. But do not hurry; take time, consult your own heart; consider the whole matter. I will not press for your decision. I will wait days, weeks. I will go down to Otter in the meantime, if you prefer it. But if you do say yes, remember, dear Leslie, you confer upon me the greatest boon that a woman can bestow on a man, and I think I am capable of appreciating it.'

He spoke with singular impartiality, but without reassuring his hearer. Leslie looked helplessly up to him, excited and distressed.

He smiled a little, and sighed a brief sigh.

'You are not satisfied. You are too candid and generous. You wish me to take my refusal at once. You feel that I am too old, too dull to presume——'

'Oh, no, no,' Leslie exclaimed, seeing herself convicted of terrible selfishness and conceit, while her heart was throbbing to pain with humility and gratitude. 'You have done me a great honour, and if you would not be disappointed—if you would bear with me—if you are not deceiving yourself in your nobleness—I should be so happy to go to Ferndean.'

He thanked her eloquently, and talked to her a little longer, kindly and affectionately, and then he offered to seek her father; and left her to her agi-

tated reflections. What a fine, dignified man he looked. Could it be possible that this was her lot in life? And the very sun which had risen upon her planning a walk with Mary Elliot next week, was yet streaming upon her poor pots of geraniums on the dusty window-sill. She quitted her seat, and began to walk quickly up and down.

'Leslie, you are shaking the room.' Mamma had been in the farther window with her sewing all the time.

Leslie stole behind the brown window-curtain, fluttering her hand among the folds.

'Leslie, you are pulling that curtain awry.'

'I cannot help it, mamma.'

'Why not, child? Are you ill?'

'Yes—no, mamma. I don't know what to think —I can't think. But Hector Garret has asked me to be his wife.'

Mrs. Bower's needle dropped from her fingers. She stared at her daughter. She rose slowly.

'Impossible, Leslie,' she observed.

Leslie laughed hysterically.

'Yes, indeed. It was very strange, but I heard every word.'

'Are you certain you are not mistaken?'

Mrs. Bower had never so cross-examined her daughter in her life; but Leslie was not disturbed or vexed by her incredulity.

'Quite certain. I know it was only yesterday that you scolded me for taking liberties with his name; but he was perfectly serious, and he has gone to tell papa.'

Mrs. Bower gazed wistfully on Leslie, and a faint

red colour rose in her cheek, while she interlaced her fingers nervously.

'Leslie,' she asked again, in a shaken voice, 'do you know what you are doing?'

Leslie looked frightened.

'Is it so very terrible, mamma? I should possibly have married some day—most girls mean to do it—and only think of Ferndean and Otter. Besides, there is nobody I could like so well as Hector Garret, I am quite sure, although I little guessed he cared so much for me;' and Leslie's eyes fell, and a sunny, rosy glow mantled over her whole face, rendering it very soft and fair.

'I see it is to be, Leslie. May it be for your welfare, my dear;' and her mother stooped abruptly, and kissed the young, averted cheek.

Leslie was awed. She dreaded that her father would be equally moved, and then she did not know how she could stand it. But she might have spared herself the apprehension; for when the Professor shuffled in he sat down as usual, fumbled for his spectacles, looked round with the most unconscious eye, observed that 'Ware' had that day exceeded in his lecture by twenty minutes—'a bad practice,' (Dr. Bower was himself notoriously unpunctual); and took not the slightest notice of any event of greater importance until Leslie's suspense had been so long on the rack that it began to subside into dismay, when glancing up for a moment, he observed parenthetically, as he turned a page—'Child! you have my approval of a union with Hector Garret—an odd fancy, but that is no business of ours,'—dropped his eyes again on his volume, and made no

farther allusion to the subject for the rest of the evening—no, nor ever again, of his own free will. Hector Garret assailed him on preliminaries, his wife patiently waylaid and besieged him for the necessary funds, acquaintances congratulated him—he was by compulsion drawn more than once from roots and æsthetics; but left to himself, he would have assuredly forgotten his daughter's wedding-day, as he had done that of her baptism.

Leslie recovered from the stunning suddenness of her fate, and awoke fully to its brightness. To go down to Ayrshire and dwell there among hills and streams, and pure heather-scented air, like any shepherdess; to be the nearest and dearest to Hector Garret:—already the imaginative, warm-hearted girl began to raise him into a divinity.

Leslie was supremely content, gay and giddy with present excitement; with the pretty bustle of being so important and so occupied—she whose whole time lately had been vacant and idle—so willing to admire her new possessions, so openly elated with their superiority, and not insensible to the fact that all these prominent obtrusive cares were but little superfluous notes of the great symphony upon which she had entered, and whose infinitely deeper, fuller, higher tones she would learn well, by and by.

Leslie Bower was the personification of joy, and no one meddled with her visions. Hector Garret was making his preparations at Otter; and when Leslie sang as she stitched, and ran lightly up and down, only the servants in the kitchen laid their heads together, and confided to each other that 'never did they see so daffin' a bride; Miss Leslie

should ken that a greetin' bride's a happy bride!' but no one told Leslie—no one taught her the tender meaning of the wise old proverb—no one warned her of the realities of life, so much sadder, so much holier, purer, more peaceful than any illusion. Her mother had relapsed into her ordinary calmness, rather wounding Leslie's perceptions when she allowed herself to think of it, for she did not read the lingering assiduity that was so intent it might have been employed upon her shroud. And there was no one else—no; Leslie was quite unaware that her gladness was ominous.

Only the shadow of a warning crossed Leslie's path of roses, and she disregarded it. Her confidence in Hector Garret and in life remained unbounded.

Leslie had gone to the best known of her early companions, her cup brimming over in the gracious privilege of begging Mary Elliot to be her bridesmaid. The Elliots had been kind to her, and had once taken her to their cheerful country-house; and now Mary was to witness the ceremony, and Hector Garret had said that she might, if they pleased, pay Leslie a long visit at Otter.

Mary Elliot was a little older, a little more experienced in womanly knowledge than Leslie.

'How strange it sounds that you should be married so soon, Leslie, from your old house, where we thought you buried. We believed that you must lead a single life, unless your father made a pet of one of his students; and then you must have waited until he left college.'

'It is the reverse. I have no time to lose,' nodded

Leslie; 'only Hector Garret is not old-looking. I don't believe that he has a grey hair in his head. He is a far handsomer man than Susan Cheyne's sister's husband.'

'I know it; he was pointed out to me in the street. Is he very fond of you, Leslie?'

'I suppose—a little, or he would not have me.'

'Does he flatter you, pretend that you are a queen, say all manner of fine things to you? I should like to be enlightened.'

'No, no, Mary; real men are not like men in books—and he is not foolish.'

'But it is not foolish in a lover. They are all out of their senses—blinded by admiration and passion.'

'Perhaps; but Hector Garret is a clever man, only he speaks when he is spoken to, and does not forget you when out of sight. And do you know, I have been used to clever people, and decidedly prefer to look up to a man.'

'What does he call you, Leslie?'

'Why, Leslie, to be sure, or Miss Bower. You would not have him say Mrs. Garret yet?' And Leslie covered her face and laughed again, and reddened to the tips of her fingers.

'Not "Bonnie Leslie," "Jewel," "Angel,"' jested Mary, thrilling at the echo of a certain low, fluttered voice, that had sounded in her own ears and would wilfully repeat, 'Winsome Mary,' 'Little Woman,' 'Witch!'

'No,' Leslie replied, with honest frankness, 'that would be speaking nonsense; and if Hector Garret thinks nonsense that is bad enough.'

'Do you remember how we talked sometimes of our husbands?'

'Yes, I do. They were all to be heroes.'

'And you were to be courted on bended knees. Yes, Leslie, solicited again and again; and when you yielded at last, it should be such an act of grace that the poor fellow would be half mad with delight.'

'I was mad myself. I was full of some song or bit of poetry. I tell you again, Mary, if you have not found it out for yourself, real life is not like a book. Hector Garret is not the man to beg and implore, and wait patiently for a score of years. I wish you saw how he manages his strong horse. He sits, and does not yield a hair's breadth. Though it paws and rears, he just holds its head tight and pats its neck. Now, I want him to check and guide me. I have been left a great deal to myself. Papa and mamma are not young, and it appears to me that a single child is not enough to draw out the sympathies of a staid, silent couple. They have been very kind to me all my life, and I ought to be glad that they will not miss me much. But although it was wrong, I have often felt a little forlorn, and been tempted to have bad, discontented thoughts all by myself. However, that is over, and I hope I'm going to be a good and sensible woman now. And, Mary, I am so anxious to have your opinion upon my crimson pelisse, because mamma does not profess to be a judge; and I cannot be certain that it is proper merely on a mantua-maker's word and my own taste. I would like to do Hector Garret credit; not that I can really do so in any eyes but his own.'

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW HOME.

HECTOR GARRET had his girl wife at Otter, and very sunny her existence was for the lustrum of that honeymoon. It was almost sufficient for her to be at liberty, fairly installed in her castle in the air, a country home; and its lord and master was generous, indulgent, and wasted, he did not care to say how many days, in displaying to her the green ruinousness of Ferndean—in climbing the hills and hunting out the widest views for her—in taking her out in his boat, and rowing her in sunshine and shade, enjoying her wonder and exultation most benevolently. In a short time he left her to herself, for he had much property, to whose numerous details he attended with rigid conscientiousness, and he had been a student from his youth, and sat almost as much in his library, although it was an airier and more heterogeneously fitted-up sanctuary, as Dr. Bower. Leslie was perfectly satisfied; in fact, while the novelty around her was fresh, she preferred to wander about at her leisure, and find out places for herself, because Hector Garret was always hurrying her, and she was trying so hard to be clever, active, and amiable. Ah, that slight strain already perceptible, that growth of ignorance, misconception, and extravagant reverence—what fruit would it bear?

Otter was a rambling white house in a green meadow opening to the sea. Its salient points were its

size and age. The slowest growing shrubs in its pleasance were tough, seamed, branched, and bowed with time. There were few trees in the neighbourhood except at forsaken Ferndean; but there were low swelling hills crowned with heather closing in the valley over which Otter presided with the dignified paternal character of the great house of strath, or glen. Leslie smiled when she first heard the natives of the district term the grey or glittering track that bounded the western horizon, 'The Otter Sea,' but very soon she fell into the use of the same name, and was conscious of feeling far more interest in the boats and ships that crossed that limited space, than in those which she saw from the hill tops spread far and wide over a great expanse broken only by the misty Irish coast line. Indeed, Hector Garret explained to her that he had seignorial claims over that strip of waves—that the seaweed, and, after certain restrictions, the fragments of wreck cast upon its sands, were his property, quite as much as if he had waved his banner over it, like the gallant Spaniard, in the name of his Most Catholic Majesty.

Leslie had variety in her locality: the beach, with its huge boulders and inspiring music; the fields and 'uplands airy,' with their hedge wealth of vetch, briar, and bramble; the garden, the ancient walled garden, at whose antiquities Hector Garret laughed—its high screens of privet and box, its sweetwilliams and stocks, its pippins and codlings, its bitter black cherries and small damson plums—it was Eden to Leslie, only Adam would probably have proved less sententious to a poor town-bred wight, than the Otter garden potentate, Robin Blair.

Leslie played sad pranks in the early season of her disenthralment. She wandered far and near, and soiled the white gowns then so popular a wear, to the despair of the Otter servant who did up the master's shirts and managed the mistress's clear-starching, but who never dreamt, in those days of frills, robes, and flounces, of styling herself a laundress. Leslie filled her apron with mosses and lichens; she stole out after the reapers had left the patch of oats which was not within sight of the house, and gathered among the sheaves like a Ruth. She grew stout and hardy, and in spite of her gipsy bonnet, as brown as a berry under this out-of-door life, until no one would have known the waxen-faced city girl; and many a time when Hector Garret left his study in the dusk and found his way to the drawing-room, he discovered her asleep from very weariness, with her head laid down on her spindle-legged work-table, and the white moonbeams trying to steal under her long eyelashes. He would tread softly, and stand, and gaze, but he never stooped and kissed her cheek in merry frolic, never in yearning tenderness.

Such was Leslie's holiday: let her have it—it ended, certainly. The bleak October winds began to whistle in the chimneys and lash the Otter sea into foam; the morning mists were white and dense on the hills, and sometimes the curtain never rose the whole day; the burns were hoarse and muddy, the sheep in fold, the little birds silent. Leslie loved the prospect still, even the wild grey clouds rent and whirled across the sky, the watery sun, the ragged, wan, dripping verdure; but it made her shiver too, and turn to her fireside, where she would doze

and yawn, work and weary in her long solitary hours. Hector Garret was patient and good-humoured: he took the trouble to teach her any knowledge to which she aspired; but he was so far beyond her, so hopelessly superior, that she was vexed and ashamed to confess to him her ignorance, and it was clear that when he came up to her domain in the evening he liked best to rest himself, or to play with her in a fondling, toying way. After the first interminable rainy day which she had spent by herself at Otter, when he entered and proceeded in his cool, rather lazy fashion to tap her under the chin, to inquire if she had been counting the rain drops, to bid her try his cigar, she felt something swelling in her throat, and answered him shortly and crossly; but when she found that he treated her offended air as the whim of a spoilt child, and was rather the more amused by it, she determined that he should not be entertained by her humours. Perilous entertainment as it was, Leslie could not have afforded it; her wilderness tamed her so that she welcomed Hector Garret eagerly, submitted to be treated as a child, exerted herself to prattle away gaily and foolishly when her heart was a little heavy and her spirits languid.

Leslie saw so little of her husband—perhaps it was the case with all wives; her father and mother were as much apart—but Leslie did not understand the necessity. She did not like her life to be selfish, smooth, and aimless, except for her own fancies, as it had been from the first. She wanted to share Hector Garret's cares and his work which he transacted so faithfully. She wished he thought her half as worth

consulting as his steward. She had faith in woman's wit. She had a notion that she herself was quick and could become painstaking. She tried entering his room once or twice uninvited, but he always looked so discontented, and when she withdrew so relieved, that she could not persevere in the attempt.

When Hector Garret went shooting or fishing, Leslie would have accompanied him gladly, would have delighted in his trophies, and carried his bag or his basket, if he had allowed it, like any gillie or callant of the Highlands or Lowlands; but his excursions were too remote and fatiguing, and beyond the strength that was supposed consistent with her sex and nurture.

Little fool! to assail another's responsibilities and avocations when her own were embarrassing her sufficiently. Her household web had got warped and entangled in her careless, inexperienced hands, and vexed and mortified her with a sense of incapacity and failure—an oppression which she could not own to Hector Garret, because there was no common ground, and no mutual understanding between them. When Leslie came to Otter she found the housekeeping in the hands of an Irish follower of the Garrets—themselves of Irish origin; and Hector Garret presented Bridget Kennedy to his wife as his faithful and honoured servant, whom he recommended to a high place in her regard. Bridget Kennedy displayed more marked traces of race than her master, but it was the Celtic nature under its least attractive aspect to strangers, proud, passionate, fanciful, and vindictive. She was devoted to her master, and capable of consideration for Leslie on

his account—though jealous of her entrance upon the stage of Otter; but she evinced this reflected interest by encroachments and tyranny, a general determination to adhere doggedly to her own ways, and to impose them upon her mistress.

Leslie began by admiring Bridget, as she did everything else at Otter: her apple-green poplin, her fine linen neckerchief, her steel chain and rattling keys, her bright black eyes, and by pitying her lameness—she had been deformed and disabled from her birth, and her fiery spirit had kept up an unceasing contention with the flesh. Leslie would have propitiated the mayor of the palace with kind words and attentions, but when she was snapped up in her efforts, she drew back with a girl's aptness to be affronted and repelled. Next Leslie began to resist angrily Bridget's unbecoming interference with her movements, and design of exercising authority and control over the child whom the master had chosen to set over his house; but her fitful impulses were met and overruled by stubborn and slenderly veiled fierceness. Leslie was not weak, but she was undisciplined; and she who had been the young Hotspur of the most orderly and pacific of families, learnt to tremble at the sound of Bridget's crutch in the lobbies, and her shrill voice rating the servants flying to do her bidding.

Those luckless, long-haired Merovingian monarchs, what a figure do they make in history! Leslie was not quite so supine, but in proportion as she cowered at her subordinate, the subordinate was tempted to despise her and lord it over her.

Hector Garret was blind to this contention; for

his own part, he humoured Bridget or smiled at her asperities, as suited him, and it is probable that if appealed to he would have adopted his old favourite's side, and censured Leslie as touchy, inconsiderate, perhaps a little spiteful; but he never was made umpire, for Leslie had all the disadvantage of a noble temper in an unseemly struggle. Bridget plagued Leslie, but Leslie would not injure Bridget, —no, not for the world. The imperious old woman was Hector Garret's friend; he had said that he had known no firmer friend than Bridget Kennedy. She had closed his father's eyes, she had stood by himself in sickness and sorrow (for all his strength and self-command, Hector had known sickness and sorrow, that was a marvel to Leslie)—Bridget might clutch her rights to the end, what did it signify? only a little pique and bitterness to an interloper.

Leslie had ceased to credit that she would ever become the wise, helpful woman that she had once warmly desired to see herself; for her own defects were now familiar and sorely disheartening to her, and she had grown aware that she could not by inspiration set and preserve in smooth, swift motion the various wheels of Otter, not even if—unlooked-for and undesired sequel!—she received express permission to dance upon the head of old Bridget.

Leslie had fancied once, when Hector Garret told her how few neighbours lived within visiting distance, that she should not want society; but the solitude was matter of regret, especially when it proved that of the few families who exchanged rare intercourse, some of better birth than breeding scarcely held the daughter of the disinherited laird

and Glasgow scholar on their level in social rank, or a spouse worthy of the master of Otter, and so entitled to their special esteem.

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This Earlscraig was now little more than a grim, grey turret, seldom occupied; the companion body of the building had been destroyed nearly a score of years before by a fire—the tragedy of the country-side, as it consummated the ruin of an old family—and in its horrors a lady of the house perished miserably. So the sight of its cold cluster of chimneys, wind-rocked walls, and scorched and crumbling vestiges of sudden destruction, far from adding to the cheerfulness of the landscape, was a blot on its rural prosperity.

The homes of humbler friends were foreign thresholds to Leslie; the reserved, engrossed, dignified master of Otter crossed them with a freer step. Leslie could but address her servants, and venture to intermeddle bashfully with their most obvious concerns. She had neither tongue nor eye for more distant and difficult dependents.

But Leslie was not dying of ennui or spleen, or miserable with a nameless, fathomless misery. She was only disenchanted—conscious of feeling a great deal older than she had done six months since. How could she have been so credulous, so vain! Verily, every path of roses has its panoply of thorns.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PAGES OF THE PAST.

ONE winter night Leslie, in her deep chair, observed Hector Garret turning over the leaves of an old pocket-book; catching her eye, he offered it to her with a 'See, Leslie, how my father chronicled the fashions'—he never did suppose her susceptible of very grave interests.

In the dearth of other amusement, Leslie pored over the ancient diary, and found more suggestive paragraphs than the entry indicated: 'Abel Furness has sent me a waistcoat an inch and a half shorter, and a pair of clouded silk hose for the black ditto, ordered.' There were—'Three pounds English to my boy Hector, to keep his pocket during his stay at Ardhope.' 'A crown to Hector as fee for fishing out the black stot that broke its neck over the rocks.' 'A letter from Utrecht from my son Hector; a fair hand and a sensible diction.' 'Forty pounds over and above paid to please Hector on the bond over the flax-fields of Ferndean.' 'A small stipend secured to my thriftless kinsman, Willie Hamilton, by the advice and with the aid of my son Hector.' 'To Earlscraig with Hector:' this notice was repeated many times, until the record closed abruptly with the tremulous thanksgiving—'My dear son and heir, Hector, recovered of his malady by the blessing of God.'

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With flushing cheeks Leslie sat, and spread out the crushed, brittle spikes, so fondly won, so dearly held. She was sure Hector had not one leaf, riband, or ring which she had given him. Once when he was gayer than his wont, and plagued her with his jesting petting, she took up the scissors and cut off a lock of his hair. He did not notice the theft till it was accomplished, and then he stood half-thoughtful, half-contemptuous. He had not a hair of hers, the whole head was his; but his father had judged otherwise.

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good wishes, their noonday cares, their evening cheer, their nightly prayers. Was their union only apparent? were they severed by a dim, shapeless, insurmountable barrier, for ever together, yet for ever apart?

These shades lingered and abode with Leslie in her lonely vigils, ere she distinguished whether their language was that of warning or reproach. She studied their material likenesses—the last save one in the picture-gallery — honest faces, bright with wholesome vigour; their son Hector's was a finer physiognomy, but the light had left lip and eye, and Leslie missed it as she gazed wistfully at these shadows, and compared them with their living representative. Stiff and staring these two portraits, but abundantly characteristic—the bluff gentleman in the green hunting coat, in which he had leaped many a thickset hedge, and scoured many a height and hollow, for he had been a mighty hunter in his day, as well as a loyal lover and generous master—the handsome, portly lady, likewise in a gold-laced cap, for she also had been a rider, and followed her lord in his pursuit of the hounds as in every other—whether superficially or thoroughly, Leslie was sadly puzzled to determine, for indeed the Otter chronicles classed the two as one, and linked them inseparably until death dissolved the union, and the laird remained a widowed man for the remnant of his days. The laird and the lady planned the garden; the laird and the lady brought in the cultivated acres of moorland; the laird and the lady were even allied in her yards of carpet-work, for had he not reared the sheep and dyed the wool which her fingers worked indefatigably? Here was

a novelty to Leslie which she was not prepared to admit.

A stranger came to Otter: that was an unfrequent event, even when the spring was advancing, and the boats which had been drawn up for the winter were again launched in the cove, and the brown nets hung anew to dry on the budding whins and gowans—the April gowans converting the haugh into a 'lily lea.' Their nearest neighbour, only an occasional resident among them, lounged over with his whip, dog-call, and dogs, and entered the drawing-room at Otter, to be introduced for the first time to its mistress. Leslie's instincts were hospitable, and they were by no means strained by exercise; but she did not like this guest; she felt an involuntary repugnance to him, although he was very courteous to her—with an elaborate, ostentatious homage that astonished and confused her. He was a man of Hector Garret's age, but even in his rough coat with marked remains of youthful foppishness and pretension. He was a tall man, with beard and moustache slightly silvered; his aquiline features were sharpened and drawn; his bold searching eyes sunken. He was a gentleman, even an accomplished and refined gentleman in manner and accent—and yet there was about him a nameless coarseness, the brutishness of self-indulgence and low aims and ends, which no polish could efface or conceal.

Leslie, notwithstanding her slight knowledge of life, apprehended this, and shrank from the man; but he addressed Hector Garret with the ease of an intimate associate — and Hector Garret, with his pride and scrupulousness, suffered the near approach,

and only winced when the stranger accosted Leslie, complimented Leslie, put himself coolly on the footing of future friendship with the lady of the house.

The day wore on, and still the visitor remained, entertaining himself, and discoursing widely, but for the most part on practices and motives strange at Otter.

'So you've married, after all, Hector,' he said, suddenly, as they sat together in the twilight: 'well, I excuse you,' with a laugh and a touch on the shoulder.

The words were simple enough, but they tingled in Leslie's ears like insolence, and Hector Garret, so hard to rouse, bit his lips while he answered indifferently—'And when does your time come, Nigel? Are the shadows not declining with you?'

'Faith, they're so low, that there's not light left for the experiment; besides, French life spoils one for matrimony here, at least so poor Alice used to say—'no galling bonds on this side the Channel—the peaceful *convent-grille*, or a light *mariage de convenance* among the pleasant southerns'—not that they are so pleasant as they were formerly.'

Hector Garret got up and walked to one of the window recesses, his brow knit, his teeth set.

Leslie rose to steal from the room.

'Nay, stay, madam,' urged the bland, brazen intruder; 'don't rob us so soon of a fair, living apology for *fades souvenirs*.'

But 'Go, Leslie, we will not detain you,' Hector Garret exclaimed, impatiently; and Leslie hurried to her own chamber in a tumult of surprise and indignation, and vexed suspicion. Mysteries had not

and Glasgow scholar on their level in social rank, or a spouse worthy of the master of Otter, and so entitled to their special esteem.

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These shades lingered and abode with Leslie in her lonely vigils, ere she distinguished whether their language was that of warning or reproach. She studied their material likenesses—the last save one in the picture-gallery — honest faces, bright with wholesome vigour; their son Hector's was a finer physiognomy, but the light had left lip and eye, and Leslie missed it as she gazed wistfully at these shadows, and compared them with their living representative. Stiff and staring these two portraits, but abundantly characteristic—the bluff gentleman in the green hunting coat, in which he had leaped many a thickset hedge, and scoured many a height and hollow, for he had been a mighty hunter in his day, as well as a loyal lover and generous master—the handsome, portly lady, likewise in a gold-laced cap, for she also had been a rider, and followed her lord in his pursuit of the hounds as in every other—whether superficially or thoroughly, Leslie was sadly puzzled to determine, for indeed the Otter chronicles classed the two as one, and linked them inseparably until death dissolved the union, and the laird remained a widowed man for the remnant of his days. The laird and the lady planned the garden; the laird and the lady brought in the cultivated acres of moorland; the laird and the lady were even allied in her yards of carpet-work, for had he not reared the sheep and dyed the wool which her fingers worked indefatigably? Here was

a novelty to Leslie which she was not prepared to admit.

A stranger came to Otter: that was an unfrequent event, even when the spring was advancing, and the boats which had been drawn up for the winter were again launched in the cove, and the brown nets hung anew to dry on the budding whins and gowans—the April gowans converting the haugh into a 'lily lea.' Their nearest neighbour, only an occasional resident among them, lounged over with his whip, dog-call, and dogs, and entered the drawing-room at Otter, to be introduced for the first time to its mistress. Leslie's instincts were hospitable, and they were by no means strained by exercise; but she did not like this guest; she felt an involuntary repugnance to him, although he was very courteous to her—with an elaborate, ostentatious homage that astonished and confused her. He was a man of Hector Garret's age, but even in his rough coat with marked remains of youthful foppishness and pretension. He was a tall man, with beard and moustache slightly silvered; his aquiline features were sharpened and drawn; his bold searching eyes sunken. He was a gentleman, even an accomplished and refined gentleman in manner and accent—and yet there was about him a nameless coarseness, the brutishness of self-indulgence and low aims and ends, which no polish could efface or conceal.

Leslie, notwithstanding her slight knowledge of life, apprehended this, and shrank from the man; but he addressed Hector Garret with the ease of an intimate associate — and Hector Garret, with his pride and scrupulousness, suffered the near approach,

and only winced when the stranger accosted Leslie, complimented Leslie, put himself coolly on the footing of future friendship with the lady of the house.

The day wore on, and still the visitor remained, entertaining himself, and discoursing widely, but for the most part on practices and motives strange at Otter.

'So you've married, after all, Hector,' he said, suddenly, as they sat together in the twilight: 'well, I excuse you,' with a laugh and a touch on the shoulder.

The words were simple enough, but they tingled in Leslie's ears like insolence, and Hector Garret, so hard to rouse, bit his lips while he answered indifferently—'And when does your time come, Nigel? Are the shadows not declining with you?'

'Faith, they're so low, that there's not light left for the experiment; besides, French life spoils one for matrimony here, at least so poor Alice used to say—'no galling bonds on this side the Channel—the peaceful *convent-grille*, or a light *mariage de convenance* among the pleasant southerns'—not that they are so pleasant as they were formerly.'

Hector Garret got up and walked to one of the window recesses, his brow knit, his teeth set.

Leslie rose to steal from the room.

'Nay, stay, madam,' urged the bland, brazen intruder; 'don't rob us so soon of a fair, living apology for *fades souvenirs*.'

But 'Go, Leslie, we will not detain you,' Hector Garret exclaimed, impatiently; and Leslie hurried to her own chamber in a tumult of surprise and indignation, and vexed suspicion. Mysteries had not

ceased; and what was this mystery to which Hector Garret deigned to lend himself in disparaging company with a sorry, fine gentleman?

Bridget Kennedy was there before her, making a pretence of fumbling in the wardrobe, her head shaking, her lips working, her eyes blazing with repressed rage and malice.

'Is he there, madam, still?' she demanded impetuously. 'Is he torturing and maddening Master Hector with his tones and gestures? He!—he that ought to crouch among the bent grass and fern sooner than pass the other on the high road. Borrowing and begging, to lavish on his evil courses: he who could not pay us—not in red gold, but with his heart's blood—the woe he wrought. They had guileful, stony hearts, the Boswells, before they ever took to foreign lightness and wickedness; and evil to him who trafficked with them in life or death.'

'Who is he, Bridget? I do not know him; I cannot understand,' gasped Leslie.

'Don't ask me, madam—you, least of all.'

'Tell me, Bridget, tell me,' implored the girl, frightened, yet exasperated, catching the old woman's withered hands, and holding them fast.

'Don't ask me, madam,' reiterated Bridget, sternly. 'Better not.'

'I will know; what do you mean? Oh, you hurt me, you hurt me! I will ask Hector Garret himself. I cannot bear this suspense.'

'Child, do you choose what you can bear? Beware!' menaced the nurse; then, as Leslie would have broken from her—

'Have it, then. He is the brother of that Alice Boswell who perished in the burning of Earlscraig nigh twenty years ago.'

'Poor lady, Bridget,' Leslie said, with a bewildered, excited sob. 'Poor unhappy lady; but what has that to do with him, with me? I understand no better. Help me, Bridget Kennedy—a woman, like myself. I will not let you go.'

'Madam, what good will it serve? It is small matter now:' then half reluctantly, half with that possession with which truth fills its keeper, slowly and sadly she unfolded the closed story. 'What had Master Hector to do with Alice Boswell? He had to do with her as a man has to do with his heart's desire, his snare, his pitfall.'

'He loved her, Bridget; he would have wedded her. I might never have been his—that is all.'

'Love, marriage,' scornfully; 'I know not that he spoke the words, but he lay at her feet. Proud as Master Hector was, she might have trodden on his neck; cool as Master Hector seems to others, he was fire to her. I have seen him come in from watching her shadow, long hours below her window, in the wind and rain, and salt spray. I have known him when he valued her glove in his bosom more than a king's crown—blest, blest if he had but a word or a glance. But it is long gone by, madam. Master Hector has gained wisdom and gravity, and is the head of the house; and for fair Miss Alice, she has gone to her place. Yes, she was a beauty, Miss Alice; she could play on stringed instruments like the heavenly harpers, and speak many tongues, and work till the flowers grew beneath her fingers. She learnt to wile

men's souls from their bodies, if nothing more, in the outlandish parts where she was bred.'

'So fair, so gifted—did she care for him in return, Bridget? Did she love him as he loved her?' asked a faint voice.

'What need you mind, madam?' sharply. 'It is ill speaking harsh words of the dead. Did I not say she has gone to her place? God defend you from such a passage. Let her rest. Sure she cared for him, as she cared for aught else save herself. She scattered smiles and favours on scores. He knew at last what she took, and what she gave, if he did not guess it always.'

'Why did he not save her, Bridget? die with her?'

'Madam,' bitterly; 'he did what man could do. They say he was more like a spirit than a mortal; but if he was to lose his love, how could even Master Hector fight against his Maker? He was fain to follow her; he dallied with death for weeks and months. Those were fell days at Otter, but the Lord restored him, and now he is himself again, and no woman will ever move Master Hector more.'

There was silence in the room for a space. At last Bridget broke it: 'Do you want anything more with me, madam, or shall I go?'

Haughty as Bridget Kennedy was, she spoke hesitatingly, almost pitifully. She had stabbed that young thing sitting pale and cold before her; and no sooner was the deed done than her strong, deep nature yearned over her victim as it had never done to Hector Garret's girl wife, in the first rosy flush of her thoughtless gladness.

'Nothing more.' The words were low and heavy;

and when Bridget left her, Leslie raised her hands and linked them together, and stretched them out in impotence of relief.

What was this news that had come to her as from a far country?—this blinding light, this burst of knowledge that had to do with the very springs of a man's nature, this fountain so full to some, so empty to others? She had been deceived, robbed. Hector Garret was Alice Boswell's—in life and death, Alice Boswell's.

This love, which she had known so slightly, measured so carelessly—oh, light, shallow heart!—had been rooted in his very vitals, had constrained him as a conqueror his captive, had been the very essence of the man until it spent itself on Alice Boswell's wild grave. He had come to her with a lie in his right hand, for he was bound and fettered in heart, or else but the blue, stiff corpse of a man dead within; he had betrayed her woman's right, her best, dearest, truest right, her call to love and be loved. Another might have wooed her as he had wooed Alice Boswell; to another she might have been the first, the only one! She knew now why she was no help-meet, no friend for him; why his hand did not raise her to his eminence, his soul's breath did not blow upon hers, and create vigour, goodness, and grace to match his own. Deep had not cried unto deep: heart had not spoken to heart: the dry bones, the vacant form, the empty craving, were her portion; and out of such unnatural hollowness have arisen, once and again, deadly lust and sin.

Why had none stepped in between her and this cruel mockery and temptation? 'Mother, mother, how

could you be false to your trust? Were you, too, cheated and bereft of your due? left a cold, shrinking woman, withering, not suddenly, but for a whole lifetime?'

Leslie sat long weighing her burden, until a tap at the door and Bridget Kennedy's voice disturbed her. 'Earlscraig is gone, madam; Master Hector is sitting alone with his thoughts in your room. May be, he is missing his cup of tea, or, if you please, madam, his lady's company that he is used to at this hour.'

Leslie rose mechanically, walked out, and entered her drawing-room. What did he there, his eyes fixed on the broken turret of Earlscraig, defined clearly on the limited horizon, his memory hovering over the fate of fair Alice Boswell?

Was it horrible to be jealous of a dead woman? to wish herself in that ever-present grave, sacred to him as the holiest, though no priest blessed it, no house of God threw over it the shadow of the finger pointed to heaven—the cross that bore a world's Saviour? But that swift and glowing passage from life and light and love, such as his to darkness, forgetfulness—eternity. How could she have faced it? Bridget, her old enemy, had prayed she might be delivered from it, whatever her trials.

'Nigel Boswell is gone at last; he was an old playfellow, and fortune and he have been playing a losing game ever since,' he said, in unsuspecting explanation, as he joined her where she sat in her favourite window.

She did not answer him; she was stunned, and sat gazing abstractedly on the wallflowers rendering golden the mossy court wall, or far away on the

misty Otter sea. She thought he had relapsed into his reveries, was with the past, the spring-tide of his life, the passion of his early manhood, while she was a little school-girl tripping demurely and safely along the crowded Glasgow streets. If she had looked up at him she would have seen that he was observing her curiously—wondering where his young wife had acquired that serious brow, those fixed eyes.

'What are you thinking of, Leslie?'

'Nothing; I cannot tell,' hastily and resolutely.

'That sounds suspicious.' He put his hand on her head, as he had a habit of doing, but she recoiled from him.

'What a shy little brain that dreads that a finger of mine on its soft covering must discover its secrets! Are they treasures, Leslie?'

Oh, blind, absent, reckless man, what treasure-keeper kept such ward!

Lightly won, was lightly held.

Leslie struggled with her oppression for several dull feverish days; then, driven by her own goading thoughts, her sense of injury, her thirst for justice and revenge, she left the house and wandered out on the beach to breathe free air, to forget herself in exertion, fatigue, stupor. It was evening, dark with vapour—gloomy, with a rising gale, the sea beginning to mutter and growl. Leslie sat shivering by the water's edge, fascinated by the sympathy of nature with her bitter hopelessness. A voice on the banks and meadows, even in the chill night air, whispered of spring advancing rapidly, with buds and flowers, with sap, fragrance, and warmth, and the tender grace of its flood of green; but here, by the

waves, a passing thunder-cloud, a stealthy mist, a whistling breeze, darkened the scene, and restored barren, dismal winter in a single hour. The night drooped down without moon or star, and still Leslie sat listless, drowsy with sorrow, until as she rose she sank back sick and giddy; and then the idea of premature death, of passing away without a sign, of hiding her pain under the silent earth that has covered so many sins and sorrows, first laid hold of her.

The notion was not fairly welcome: she was young; her heart had been recently wrung; she had been listless and disappointed—but she had loved her few isolated engagements, her country life, her household dignity, the protection of her husband. She could not divest herself of these feelings at once. She feared the great unknown into which she should enter; but still death did not appal her as it might have done: it was something to be scanned, waited for, submitted to, as a true sovereign.

The cold wind pierced her through and through; the rain fell; she could not drag herself from the shelving rock, though the tide was rising. She felt frozen, her limbs like lead, her mind wandering, or lapsing into unconsciousness.

She did not hear a call, an approaching foot; but her sinking pulses leapt up with sudden power and passion when Hector Garret stooped over her, and endeavoured to raise her.

'Here, Bridget, she is found! Leslie, why have you remained out so late? You have been sleeping; you have made yourself ill. How can you be so rash, so imprudent? It is childish—wrong. You have

cost us anxiety—distress. Poor old Bridget has stumbled farther in search of you, this squally night, than she has ventured on the sunniest morning for many a year.'

He was excited, aggrieved; he upbraided her. He had sympathy for old Bridget's infirmities; he knew nothing of his wife's misery.

Leslie resisted him as she had done since that day, slipped from his clasp, strove to steady herself, and to walk alone in her weakness. Bridget put her feeble arm around her.

'Lean on me, madam, and I will lean on you, for I am frail, and the road is rough, and the wind blowing fresh, besides the darkness.' 'I knew that would quiet her,' she muttered. 'Poor old Bridget indeed! said Master Hector, poor colleen! misled, misguided. Cruel makes cruel. St. Patrick could not save himself from the hard necessity.'

Hector Garret was content since he saw Leslie safe; he accused her of captiousness and nervousness, but it was the waywardness and perversity of illness. He had tried her simple nature with too much alienation from her kind; she had grown morbid on the baneful diet, tutored though she had been to self-dependence. He had been to blame; but her merry temper would come back, and the rose to her cheek, and the spring to her foot, with other ties, other occupations—dearer, more sufficient.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOTHER AND CHILD.

'HOW is the poor child, Bridget Kennedy? Does she fare as she should do?'

'The child is as fine a child, Master Hector, as if she had been a boy, and a Garret, on both sides the house, and will thrive if her mother will let her. There are mothers that would hinder their bairns in the death-rattle, and there are others that so watch their little ones that the angels of God are displaced from their cradles; and the weary human care haunts and harasses the infant, and stops its growth.'

'I am not learned in these matters, Bridget. You brought me up; I trust you to rear my children.'

'None shall rear them but their mother, Master Hector; none shall come between her and them. I have ruled long at Otter, but I dare not dispute with her there.'

'Settle it as you like. I did not mean them—I was not thinking of them at all. I asked for their mother. You have experience. Is she well—happy as she should be?'

'I wish you would not provoke such mistakes, Master Hector,' said Bridget, pettishly; 'I wish you would find some other name for your wife. You should know best, but is it suitable to term the nursling and the parent by the same title? I am a

foolish old woman, but it seems strange to me. Your father did not confound them.'

'Ah! I daresay not. We will find a Christian name for the new comer, and end the Comedy of Errors, since you dislike it, and Leslie too, doubtless; for women are nice on these points.'

'Leslie, what shall we call the baby?' inquired Hector Garret the next time he stood by his wife's side, wishing to divert her by a pleasant difficulty, and to vary the expression of those large eyes—larger now than ever—which, he knew not why, fascinated him by the intensity of their gaze. 'I cause Bridget to blunder oddly between you two; so set her at rest by fixing as soon as you can the momentous question.'

'I have fixed,' answered Leslie, quietly.

'I commend your foresight; a man, now, would have left the alternative open to the last.'

'Mrs. Garret's first daughter must be named for Mrs. Garret's mother,' declared Bridget, authoritatively.

'No,' denied Leslie, hastily; 'I have named her for myself—if you do not object,' she added, with a flush, half shame, half pride.

'I? Oh, no; do as you will. It will not solve Bridget's puzzle; but I am content. Leslie is a bonnie title.'

Leslie compressed her lip.

'My mother's name is bonnier,' she said, abruptly; 'my mother's name is Alice.'

He started, and gazed at her keenly, while she continued, falteringly, but with a stubborn will in her speech:—

'I wish my baby to be mine in everything, particularly as she is a girl. I am neither wise nor clever, nor strong now. I fear I am often peevish; but you will excuse me, because I am a weak, ignorant woman. Such defects are not fatal in a mother; hundreds have overcome them for their children. I trust that I will be, if not what a better woman might have been, at least more to my child than any other can be. Her mother!—so holy a tie must confer some peculiar fitness. Yes; my baby is mine, and must lie on my knees, and learn to laugh in my poor face. And so I wish her to have my name also, that there may be a complete union between us.'

He knew now what intelligence had reached her; and while the old wound burnt afresh, the shyness of the still but sensitive nature, the pride of the grave strong man, were offended and injured. He was only conscious of the petulant, unreasonable, unkind surface; he did not sound the deep resentment and jealousy beneath; he did not dream of the anguish of the secret cry whose outward expression struck upon his vexed ears; he did not hear the inner protest, 'I will not have my baby bear his love's name; recal her to him, be a memorial of her; be addressed with fondness as much for the sake of old times as for her own, the innocent!—be brought up to resemble Alice, trained to follow in her footsteps, until, if I died, my child would be more Alice Boswell's than mine. Never, never!'

Hector Garret little knew Leslie Bower; slowly he arrived at the discovery. First a troubled suspicion, then a dire certainty. Not the transparent, light-hearted, humble girl, whom a safe, prosperous

country home, an honourable position, a kindly regard, left more than satisfied—happy; but the visionary, enthusiastic woman, confiding, but claiming confidence for confidence; tender and true, but demanding like sincerity, constancy, purity, and power of devotion. Had he but known her the first: but a man's fate lies in one woman; had he but left her in her girlish sweetness and gaiety; had he never approached her with his cold overtures—his barren, artificial expediency and benevolence. She erred in ignorance and inexperience; but he against the bitter fruit of knowledge, in wilful tampering with truth—reluctantly, misgivingly—selfishly cozening his conscience, hardening himself in unbelief, applying salve to the old vital stab to his independence, with an egotistical and presumptuous conceit of protecting and befriending the young full life which without him would have found for itself an outlet, and flown on rapid, free, and rejoicing, had he only refrained from diverting its current into a dull, dark, long-drained channel, where it was dammed up, or oozed out sluggishly, gloomily, despairingly—without natural spring-time, sunshine, abundance, gladness, until lost in the great sea.

He had viewed but the soft silken bud, whose deep cup was drunk with dew,—its subtle, spicy fragrance pervading, lingering after the leaves were drooping and the bloom fled, its rich, royal hues were yet to come. In his blind coarse blundering he had mistaken the bud for the flower, the portal for the church; he had entered with heedless, profane foot, and blighted the blossom and rifled the altar. For the leaves had been unclosed, the gates unbarred

under his neglect; and Leslie, with a noble woman's frankness, generosity, and meekness—that true meekness which oftenest cleaves and melts the ringing metal of a high spirit—Leslie had begun to love him, to fix her heart upon him, to grow to him—stolid, sardonic statue that he was!—until that shock exposed his flaws and wrenched her from her hold. Better to be thus rudely dissevered, perhaps, than to waste her womanliness, puny and pale from its vague bald nourishment, on a fraud and a farce.

Hector Garret awoke from his delusion, from his scholarly reveries, his active enterprise. 'He that provideth not for his own house is worse than an infidel.' So he watched Leslie: he saw her rise up with her thoughtful face, very individual it appeared now, and go up and down carrying her baby. He was aware that she was appropriating it as her treasure; that she was saying to herself some such words—'Silver and gold have I none, but this is my pearl beyond price; she will be enough for me; she must be so; I will make her so. She and I will waste no more silly tears on hard, changeable men. They are not like us, little daughter; they pass us by, or they love us once with fierce desire; and when satiated or balked, they turn to us again to please their eye, flatter their ear, vary their leisure; to anatomize and torture like other favourites of an hour. We will have none of them, save to do our duty. We will live for each other.'

Not that she deprived him of his rights as a father; she was too magnanimous to be unjust, and she would not have balked that puppet, to whose service she consecrated herself, of one privilege which any

pangs of hers could purchase. She had rather that motive, than any notion that

> Baby fingers, waxen touches,
> Pressed *her* image from his heart.

She presented their child to him with a serious stateliness, as if it was so very solemn a ceremony that its performance emancipated her from ordinary emotion; she came and consulted him on the small questions that concerned its welfare with the same absorbing care. If he came near her when she bore the child in her arms, she offered it to him immediately: she was righteous as well as valiant—yes, very valiant. He contemplated her steadfastness with wonder. After the blow which overcame her, when a compensation was given her—a blessing to atone for the gall in her cup, she accepted it and cherished it, and set herself to be grateful for it and worthy of it immediately. The fortitude which, after the involuntary, inevitable rebellion, would permit no more idle repining, the decent pride that hid its own disease and bore it bravely, even the sternness that set its teeth against reaction—he recognised them all; it was studying the reflection of his own lofty features in the fragile, quivering flesh of a girl.

What is often proposed, rarely practised, Leslie did. She changed her ways, with what travail of spirit, what heart-sickness she alone could tell. It is no common, slight, or safe influence that causes a revulsion in the whole bodily system; it is no skin-deep puncture that bleeds inwardly; it is no easy lesson that the disciple lays to heart: but Leslie sur-

mounted and survived it. She had escaped her responsibilities, and slumbered at her post. She would do so no longer. She belonged now, after little Leslie, to her household, and its members might yet be the better for her, and Hector Garret should respect—not pity her. She vindicated her matronhood suddenly and straightforwardly, but with a sedateness and firmness that was conclusive of her future power; she had much to acquire, but she would gain something every day and every hour, until Otter should own no abler mistress. Then for her child, she would teach herself that she might instruct her daughter, so that if she proved inquiring and meditative like her father, she need not soon weary of her simple mother, and turn altogether to a more enlightened and profound instructor. Surely there was some knowledge that a woman could best store up and dispense, some gift wherein the vigorous and well-trained man did not bear the universal palm? Leslie strove to cultivate her talents; for these in her position there was scarcely a choice of fields, but she had eminently the power of observation, and her sharpened motives supplied the defects of her early education. Leslie became a naturalist—the most original and untrammelled of naturalists, for she proceeded upon that foundation of anecdotal and experimental acquaintance with herb and tree, insect, bird and beast, and even atmospheric phenomena, whose unalloyed riches are peculiar to rustic and isolated genius.

Hector Garret observed this growiug taste, and appreciated it. Leslie had ceased to apologize for her stupidity, and to be shy of his scrutiny. When

he found her procuring and preserving this or that specimen, or noting down a primitive fact, if he asked an explanation he had one directly.

'This pale flower, and that with the green flowers and the great leaves, are lady's-smock and lady's-mantle; they say they are named for the Virgin, but I think Adam must have named them in the Garden. Bridget tells me that the Irish believe the fairies sleep in these bells. This is the plant of whose root cats are so fond that they burrow about it and nibble it, and as it does not hurt them, I have dug up a bit for our puss—little Leslie looks after her already. I have been writing down the day when the swallow twittered at the window, to compare with their arrival next summer. Peggy Barbour saw a double nest with one hole last year; it must have been an old pair and a young maintaining a joint roof-tree. Yes, of course, these are jay's feathers.'

Another resource which Leslie found within Hector Garret's perception was that of music. She had been endowed with a flexible, melodious voice, and as soon as she had use for them, she gathered by magic a host of ditties, blithe or sad, stirring or soothing—from the romantic fervour of 'Charlie, he's my darling,' to the pathos of 'Drummossie Moor,' or the homely, biting humour of 'Tibbie Fowler,' to carol to the accompaniment of the ancient spinnet, in order to cheer or lull the child.

Hector Garret would move to his study-window, and open it softly, in the gloaming hour when the purple sunset was on the sea, and the bats abroad from the old chimneys, to listen to his wife in the room above singing to her child. He did not hear

her music otherwise: if he had solicited it, she would have complied with a little surprise, but he did not seek the indulgence.

The alteration in Leslie which matured her unexpectedly from a girl to a woman affected powerfully both the arbiters of her destiny. Bridget Kennedy, from a tyrant, was fairly transformed into her warmest and most faithful adherent. There was something high and great in the wild old woman, that could thus at once confess her error, admit greatness in any form in another, and succumb to it reverently. Truly, Bridget Kennedy was like fire to the weak and foolish, a scourge and a grisly phantom; to the brave and capable, a minister fearless, fond, and untiring to her last breath.

It was very strange to Hector Garret to be sensible of Bridget's lapse from his side, to hear the present madam, the subdued, diligent woman, canonized to the level of the grand, glad lady of Otter to whom Bridget had been so long fanatically loyal. He said to himself that the child had helped to effect it, the precious descendant, the doted-on third generation, but he was uncertain. He himself was so impressed with the patient woman he had formed out of the lively girl, so tortured by a conviction that he had gagged and fettered her—that her limbs were cramped and benumbed, her atmosphere oppressive, her life self-denying, that he could bear it no longer.

'God forgive me, Leslie, for the wrong I have done you,' he confessed one night with a haggard, remorseful face, when she stood, constrained and pensive, on his joyless hearth.

She looked up quickly, she laughed a dry laugh.

'You are dreaming,' she replied. 'How much larger Otter is than the Glasgow house; it was a mere cupboard in comparison. How much pleasanter the fields and hills and sands than the grimy, noisy streets where my head ached and my eyes were weary. And little Leslie is a thousand times dearer than my own people, or any companions that I ever possessed. Hush, hush! I hear her cry; don't detain me, unless for anything that I can do for you—because nothing keeps me from Leslie.'

The coals of fire were heaped upon his head: there could be no reparation.

Why was Hector Garret not resigned? It was a cruel mistake, but it might have been worse, for hearts are deceitful, and what is false and baneful is apt to prove an edge-tool. Here was permanent estrangement, comfortless formality, cold, compulsory esteem; but there was no treachery in the household, no malignant hate, no base revenge.

But Hector Garret would not rest: he had far less or far more energy than his wife; he walked his lands a moody, harassed man. The turmoil and distraction of his youth seemed recalled; he lost his equanimity; his regular habits faded from him. Leslie could no longer count on his prolonged absence, his short stated visits; he would be with her at any time within doors or without—to exchange a word or look, and go as he came, to return as unaccountably and inconsistently. It vexed Leslie; she tried not to see it; it made her curious, anxious; and what had she to do with Hector Garret's flushed cheek and shining eye? Some anniversary, some combination of present associations and past recollections—

a tendency to fly from himself, besetting at times the most self-controlled—might have caused this change in his appearance. Ah! better twist and untwist the rings of little Leslie's fair hair, and dress and undress her as she had done her doll; better examine the shell cracked by the yellow-hammer, and count the spots on the broad, brown leaf of the plane, than perplex herself with so uncongenial a difficulty. But the difficulty pursued her nevertheless, and baffled and bewitched her as it has done wiser people.

The master and mistress of Otter were spectators of the harvest home, the plentiful feast, the merry dance in the spacious barn where their share of the fruits of the earth was about to be garnered. Leslie stood in her complimentary, gay gala ribands, with her fingers meeting upon her wedding-ring, looking composedly and with interest on the buxom women and stalwart men, the loving lads and lasses, the cordial husbands and wives. Hector Garret, however, scarcely tarried to reply to their health and prosperity drunk in a flowing bumper, but broke from the scene as if its good was his evil, its blessing his curse.

In the parish church where Leslie had exhibited her bridal finery—and it is to be feared in her volatile youth squandered as many of her golden moments of devotion, as did the wife and daughters of good Dr. Primrose, of whom she had read as a warning, not as an example—when Leslie listened to the clergyman, and bent her head in penitence and worship, she was disturbed by Hector Garret's gesture of restlessness and attitude of care.

When the new moon was rising in the sky, as lustrous and as pure these thousand years, the same moon hanging over the same sea, and he pacing up and down unquiet and dissatisfied as ever, with Leslie bidding the little one look up and clap her hands, carrying her off to her cradle pillow, coming back after a weary absence to stand and look in her turn at the moon, he was close to her, he was murmuring 'Leslie,' 'Leslie,' but she turned upon him pale and cold as the moon above her, and addressed him, 'See, yonder is a ship doubling Earlscraig point and steering into the Otter sea.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORM.

THE October winds, tossing the late oats and the frosted heather, were lashing the Otter sea into heaving waves and flakes of foam. That western sea has its annals and its trophies, as well as den and moor. Edward Bruce crossed it to give to Ireland as dauntless a king as he whom a woman crowned, and found a nameless grave; and there, in the glassy calm of a summer night, the vessel, and its passengers lulled in fatal security and slumber profound as that of the Lotos eaters, 'manhood's noble head' and 'beauty's flowery crown,' the pilgrim from the far West, and the child at his father's door, sank like lead, fathoms beyond the aid of modern science with its myriads of inventions and its hardy self-confidence.

The few fishers of Otter were exposed to the swell

rolling from New England and Labrador to Galloway and Argyle; many a lamp stood day and night in cottage windows, many an anxious woman forsook her brood, and under her sheltering plaid ran here and there, dizzy and desperate, to beg for counsel, and tidings of the husband and father whose boat was due, and who was still exposed to the pitiless fury of the tempest.

Hector Garret was early summoned to marshal his men in order to succour those who were within his reach; to think, plan, and act to the last for those who were a-missing, but might yet be rescued. He had been upon the beach all day; he had been handling rope and line; he had been ready at any moment to launch his own boat among the breakers.

Leslie, too, had been abroad. She had been in several houses, especially in those whose young children were of the same age as Leslie. In all she met the same abandonment; whether the heads of the families chanced to be young or old, worthy or unworthy, mattered not; they were now the sole thought, the object of racking anxiety, lamented over beforehand with sore lamentation. If they were safe, all was well; if they were lost, these wives and mothers were bereaved indeed. The Sabine women did not cling to their rough masters with more touching fidelity. The men were in trouble—their imprudence, their intemperance, their violence were blotted out.

Leslie went home in disturbance and pain. She, too, placed a light in her window; she, too, left her infant untended, and strained her eyes to pierce the storm. Hector Garret must have descried her figure

as he approached the house, for he came straight to her room, and stood a moment with his dripping clothes and a glow on his face.

'Don't go, Leslie; I'll be back presently.'

She put a force upon herself, and busied herself with the refreshments laid out for him. He came in immediately, and advanced towards her with the same eager phrase, 'Don't go, Leslie,' and he grasped her gown lightly. She sat down while he ate and drank.

'I'll have a cup of tea, Leslie; pour me out my tea as you used to do.' She had always poured out tea for him, but not always with him close by, and his detaining hand upon her dress.

'This is like old times. They were very foolish—those old times, but they have their sweetness to look back upon them.' She interrupted him—

'They are all safe, are they not?'

'Every man of them, thank God.'

He was spent with his exertions; he was fevered and incoherent; she let him speak on, detailing the minutest particulars. She even said with animation, and the tears in her eyes—

'Their protector and deliverer! God will bless you for this, Hector Garret.' He bent his head, but he held out his arms.

'Will you bless me, Leslie?'

His voice was thick and hoarse; it petrified her, so still was she—so dumb; and at that moment the knocker sounded, and importunate voices demanding the Laird of Otter.

He obeyed the summons, spoke with his servants a little time, and returned to find Leslie in the same

arrested posture, with the same blanched face. He had resumed his seaman's coat, and carried his cap in his hand. He was calm now, and smiling, but with a face wan and shadowed with an inexpressible cloud.

'It may not be, Leslie,' he said, soft and low; 'Nigel Boswell's boat is in sight, struggling to make Earlscraig; he was always rash and unskilled, though seaward born and bred. If he is not forestalled, his boat will be bottom upmost, or crushed like glass within the hour. I trust I will save him; but if there be peril and death in my path, then listen to what I say, and remember it. Whatever has gone before, at this moment I am yours; you may doubt it, deny it—I swear it, Leslie. Despise me, reject me if you will; I cannot perish misinterpreted and misjudged. I loved Alice Boswell. My love is ashes with its object. I did not love you once; I love you now. I love a living woman truer, higher, holier than the dead; and for my love's sake, not for my vows—the first for love, if it be the last.'

He had her in his arms; his lingering kisses were on her eyes, her hair, her hands. He was gone, and still she remained rooted to the ground, smitten. Was it amazement, anger, terror?—or was it a wild throb of exultation for that, the real moment of their union? or because she had won him—she was his who had slighted her, sinned against her—but who was still Hector Garret, manly, wise, and noble—the hero of her girlhood.

She was roused reluctantly by the entrance of Bridget Kennedy, shaking in every limb.

'Madam, why did you let Master Hector go?—

he has had the look of a doomed man this many a day—to seek the company of his enemy. The good and the bad, the tares and the wheat! It is thus that men are called as plain as when the Banshee cries. Madam, say your prayers for Master Hector while he is still in time.'

'I must go to him, Bridget; I must follow him. Don't try to keep me. He is my husband, too. The poor women were crowding on the beach this morning. Let me go!'

She understood that he was exposing himself for another—that his life was on the turning of a straw. She ran upstairs, but she did not seek her child, and when she descended, Bridget had still to fetch her mantle and bonnet. The old woman did not seek to detain her; but as she peered out after her and wrung her hands, ejaculated through her chattering teeth, 'She will bring the Master back if anything can; nought will harm her. I, poor miserable wretch, would but clog her swiftness. Ay! he will hearken to her voice; he has been waiting for the sound weeks and months. Who would have said that Master Hector, like Samson, would twice be given a prey to a woman! He will hear her above the winds and waves; body or soul, he will obey as he did Alice Boswell twenty years ago in fire and ruin.'

Leslie hurried on in the darkness, her little feet tripping, her slight form borne back by the blast. Not thus had she wandered on those sunny, summer days when she first knew Otter; but there was that within, in the midst of her distress, that she would not have resigned for that light life twice over.

She reached the beach; the roar of the surf was in her ears, the shriek of the wind, but no human presence was visible. There flashed back upon her the vision of her hopelessness and helplessness on such another blustering, raging night—the recollection brought no comfort. She paused in dismay, with nothing but the mist and the driving rain before her. Stay! obscurely, and at intervals, she caught sight of a light, now borne on the crest of these giant waves, now sunk and lost, at their sport and mercy. Hark! a pistol-shot; that must be Boswell's appeal for aid; and yonder lay Earlscraig —yonder also was Hector toiling to rescue his ancient friend and persistent foe. She should be there too. At Earlscraig their destiny would be wrought out—the end attained.

Leslie sped along in the tumult of earth and sky; the road was more than a mile, at such a season and in such weather, toilsome, dangerous—but what deeds have not tender women achieved, strung by love, or hate.

When Leslie gained the promontory, she found the old house deserted—the few servants were on the shore, aiding or watching Hector Garret and his men in their efforts to save the last of his line, cast away within the shadow of his rocks and towers.

Leslie shrank from descending among the spectators, she remained spent and breathless, but resolute still, where she could spy the first wayfarer, hear the first shout of triumph, and steal away in the darkness, fleeing home unmarked and undetained.

It was the first occasion on which she had been close to Earlscraig. The situation, at all times ex-

posed, was now utterly forlorn. The spray was rising over the land, the waves were sapping its foundation ages old, the weird winds tearing at the coping of the shattered house; on the side where Alice Boswell's turret had stood, stones were rumbling, wild weeds streaming. The scene was very dismal and eerie, but Leslie did not shudder or faint; her senses were bent on one aim, she was impervious to all else. She sank down in a kneeling position, staring with unwinking eyes, praying with her whole heart in an agony. The light which had beguiled her, after tossing for some time to and fro, passed beyond her sight; she could not regain it, she could only continue ready to seize the first signal of bliss, or woe.

It did not come. The storm raged more madly; the desolation grew more appalling; Leslie's brain began to whirl; the solitude was rife with shapes and voices.

Above all stood fair Alice Boswell, wreathed in white flames—from the wavering cloudy mass of forms the gallant exile plunged anew into the flood, now seething and rushing to meet its prey.

'Oh woman—Alice Boswell—I did not steal your lover; you kept him from me long after God and man had given him to me. There are no vows and caresses in the grave. We have had but one meeting and parting; but one! Oh, stranger, he is spending his life for her brother, as you were ready to fling down yours for her. Will none of you be appeased? Then take us both; in mercy leave not the other! In death let us not be divided!'

The pang was over; Leslie passed into insensibi-

lity. When she recovered herself, the spectres of that horrible dream still flitted around her, for did she not distinguish through the surge and the blast Hector Garret's foot speeding to receive his doom?

But 'Leslie,' not 'Alice,' was his cry. Beneath the very arches of Earlscraig, where fair Alice Boswell had stood, her rich hair decked for one, her bright eyes sparkling for another, her sandal buckled for a third, and waved to him her hand, boon enough for her slave. 'Leslie!' 'Leslie!' was his cry, uttered with such aching longing, such utter despair. It was the wail of no mocking ghost, but the human cry of a breaking heart.

Leslie's tongue clove to the roof of her mouth; but no need of speech to indicate to him his weak, fluttering treasure. Found once more! Found for ever! raised and borne away swiftly and securely. No word of explanation, no reproach for folly and desperation, no recital of his labours, no information regarding others, but—strange from Hector Garret's stern lips, and sweet as strange—murmurs of fondness and devotion: 'Sweet Leslie, sweet wife, sweet mother—mother of my child—mine only, mine still, mine always.' Scoutings at weariness, cheery reckonings of their way, his heart beating against hers, her cheek to his; and it was only when Bridget Kennedy opened the door, and he asked her whether she had yet a chamber for this truant, that Leslie was aware how well Hector Garret had performed his part, and how many guests the hospitable walls of Otter sheltered that eventful night.

Bridget was solemnly praising Heaven, whose arm had been about them, and restored them both

in the flower of their days, to Otter, and to their bairn.

'We have come back for more than Otter and the bairn, Leslie. Bridget and all the men of Ayr could not have held her here, my faithful wife that needs must be my love, she has proved herself so true!'

He was throwing off her drenched cloak, and chafing her cold hands. One of them was clenched on its contents. He opened the stiffened fingers, and found a lock of hair.

'It was all relating to you which I had, Hector,' she whispered; 'I took it long ago, with your knowledge but without your consent. I would not look at it, or touch it; I kept it for little Leslie. But you said that you were mine, and it was something of yours to hold; you were mine, and it was part of you.'

'Better for Scotland that weans greet than bearded men,' averred the Lord of Glammis; but he said not, better for the men, or better for those who plight hand and heart with them, that the keen, clear eye melt not, either with ruth or tenderness. Nay, the plants of household faith and love, scathed by some lightning flash, pinched by some poverty of soil, will lift their heads and thrive apace when once they have been watered with this heavenly rain—and like the tree of the Psalmist growing by the river, will flourish pleasantly, and bear much goodly fruit thenceforth, and fade not at all, but instead, be transplanted into 'the land that is far away.'

THE END.

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